Neither Waif nor Stray: Home, Family and Belonging in the Victorian Children’s Institution, 1881–1914

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Abstract

Historical research on Victorian children’s welfare institutions has focussed on contemporary notions of ‘problem families’, models of citizenship, and ideologies of rescue and reform. Since the affective turn, scholars have produced critical studies of affect and intimacy in working-class culture whilst growing interest in material culture studies has had important implications for studies of the home. These bodies of literature, however, have yet to be drawn together. This thesis brings affect and material culture to an established literature on children’s welfare to challenge orthodoxies of institutional childhood in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods.

Using The Waifs and Strays Society as a case study, the thesis questions how belonging, attachment and individuality were created in the children’s institution by examining key narratives of home and family. This thesis argues that home, family and belonging were significant and additional dimensions to institutional objectives of rescue and reform. Although not unique to the WSS, these aspects of childcare ideology have not yet been examined by historians, who have tended to focus on institutional experiences through the lens of reform and citizenship. In particular, this study asks how the institution was constructed and perceived to be a home; how staff members and co-residents could be cast and understood as family members; and how institutional practices could offer inmates a sense of belonging, intimacy and meaningful care that could help shape a broader sense of identity over the life course.

Central to this study is the analysis of institutional literature and a range of correspondence contained in inmates’ individual case files. Examination of these sources help to provide insight into the gap between what the WSS aspired to achieve and its success in practice. Interrogation of case-file correspondence in particular highlights children’s responses to WSS practices, and in doing so, recovers the voices of some of the most marginalised groups in society.

This thesis seeks to complicate the way in which we think about Victorian institutional childhood, which has commonly been seen as negative and oppressive. A history of emotion within the children’s institution is particularly topical following recent welfare cuts, press reports and inquiries about children’s homes and child abuse. This study helps to locate anxieties about children’s nurture in a wider historical context and unpicks shifting ideas about children’s homes and the roles they should perform. The study of children in institutional care has broader historical significance for how we understand a range of people and patient populations inside institutions more generally.
Declaration

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Introduction

In the summer of 1905, Lucy L was admitted to The Waifs and Strays Society (WSS), a charitable welfare institution providing homes to outcast, destitute and friendless children.¹ Lucy was not an orphan. Her father, an army officer, had died shortly after her birth, and her mother had struggled to support her and her two siblings. Lucy’s mother remarried, most likely as an attempt to support her children, but separated from her new husband shortly after. It was at this point that Lucy’s mother could not cope any longer and handed over Lucy, aged two, to the WSS.² Between the ages of two and twelve, Lucy was boarded out. The foster family were farmers in Suffolk: Kate Cheney, her husband and three children. Lucy attended a local day school and Sunday school and shared a bedroom with one of the family’s biological daughters. The WSS inspector described Lucy as a bright and kind child and her schoolteacher described her as hard working, anxious to please, truthful and honest.

In October 1916, the Society made arrangements to transfer Lucy to one of the Society’s larger homes, St Winifred’s, so that she could be trained for domestic service.³ Her foster mother was sad to part with her and asked the WSS if she could remain a little longer so that she buy some personal belongings for her.⁴ It appears that Lucy’s foster mother could not stop thinking about her. In May 1917, she wrote to the Society to request that Lucy be returned to her care and be raised as one of her own.⁵

The matron at St Winifred’s wrote to the Society to suggest that Lucy would do well to return to her foster mother. She indicated that Lucy had not yet settled into the institutional home and that her progress with the foster family had been decidedly better in comparison.⁶ The Society stated that Lucy had ‘too much freedom’, and instead transferred her to St Ursula’s home. After a year of

¹ For the history of Lucy L, see notes and correspondence between 1905 and 1918 contained in case file 11069.
² As Lucy’s father was in the army, the War Office contributed two shillings per week to the charity towards the cost of her care.
³ This was common WSS practice when children reached the age of 12-14.
⁴ Case file 11069, Letter from K. Cheney to WSS, October 1916.
⁵ Ibid., May 1917.
training, St Ursula’s asked the Society to consider employing Lucy as she was ‘anxious to stay here’ because of her ‘fondness of the other children’. At the same point in time, Lucy’s birth mother requested her return home. Now employed, Lucy’s mother most likely recognised her daughter’s ability to contribute to the household. A letter from Lucy to the Society, however, stated her preference to stay at St Ursula’s and that she was ‘very thankful’ to the Home for their care.

In 1920, she entered a position in a laundry in Ardington Wick, Berkshire. The Society forwarded on her savings account book to her that showed she had saved £7, 1 shilling and 7 pence from pocket money and other small gifts. Lucy kept in touch with several WSS staff members and her foster mother. By March 1921, however, circumstances in Lucy’s personal life had changed. Her biological mother was suffering from consumption and required Lucy to return home. Lucy sent a letter to her former matron, enclosing her forwarding address, stating:

I am enclosing 5 shillings as a kindness for all that was done for me while I was in the home. I do hope you are feeling better…I was very pleased Mr Cordell came to see you. I still write to him. How do you like St Winifred’s? I will come and see you when I come home as it would not be very far away…I do miss the home very much…

The letter articulates gratitude and esteem for those who had formerly cared for her. Her donation to the home, and her attempts to keep in touch through visits and correspondence suggest an attachment to the home and staff. Such actions also indicate her desire to conform to the Society’s ideals of ex-WSS children. After returning home to her mother, it is possible that Lucy continued to maintain contact with her former carers. However, her case file was closed and no further notes or correspondence was recorded.

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7 Case file 11069, Letter from St Ursula’s Home, Teddington, 14/8/1918.
8 Case file 11069. The original letter does not survive, but responses confirm the mother’s request.
9 Case file 11069, Letter from Lucy to WSS, 20/9/1918.
10 This was not unusual – the Society opened an account for each child in their care, to promote ideals of self-sufficiency and thrift, and help children develop skills to manage their finances.
12 Case file 11069, Letter from Lucy to matron, 12/3/21.
Lucy’s case file is typical of the thousands of children that passed through the institution’s care between 1881 and 1914. Many of these children were placed in care because their relatives experienced economic hardship at different stages of the life cycle. Other children suffered ill treatment at the hands of their relatives and some were simply abandoned in the institution. Many children in care still had living relatives, and some did return to their families when they left care. Children in WSS care usually spent several years with the same foster family or in smaller institutional environments before their transferral to larger institutions when they were older to be trained in a range of trades, crafts and skills. This attempt to create some permanency of residence was likely to have helped to ensure a sense of security and familiarity for institutional inmates.

Like Lucy’s letters to her former carers, numerous other case files suggest that some children and WSS carers formed interpersonal ties and bonds of familiarity. Many children and their carers sustained contact with each other for several years after discharge. Other correspondence points to the sadness of some children and carers upon leaving WSS care. That many children maintained contact with the institution also suggests that the WSS attempted to foster a supportive culture that focussed on the preservation of ties between carers and children. Such correspondence could be interpreted as an early form of follow-up care and the institution’s interest in children’s longer-term wellbeing. Overall, archival evidence suggests that some of the Society’s practices reflected a concern to provide institutional inmates with a sense of home, family and belonging. This thesis focusses on these ideals of home, family and belonging, and examines how they were translated into institutional policy and practice.

**Residential welfare in context**

The residential welfare institution was a prime symbol of paternalism in Victorian society for both contemporaries and historians of the period.13

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13 For Victorian paternalism and philanthropy see David Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England* (London, 1979); Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion* (New York, 1991); Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (eds.) *Charity, philanthropy and reform: from the 1690s to 1850*, (Basingstoke, 1998); David Green, *Pauper Capital:*
Historical research on nineteenth-century institutions has demonstrated just how broad-ranging residential provision was for a variety of inmates with differing needs. Whilst institutions were diverse in their populations, aims and practices, historical scholarship suggests that these institutions shared a number of characteristics. Institutions run by both the state and voluntary agencies, such as workhouses, asylums, children’s homes, and other types of reformatories, sought to control individuals perceived to be problematic by society: the poor, disabled, sick, criminal and immoral. Similarly, scholarship suggests that the provision of ‘care’ within these institutions was scant – inmates received basic material provision, including food, clothes and shelter, but often little else.

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Scholarship has also demonstrated that institutional practices were reformatory and disciplinary in nature, aiming to transform inmates into moral, productive citizens. Laundry workloads implemented in a range of reformatories for ‘fallen’ women is just one example of the disciplinary nature of such institutions.

Likewise, in workhouses and a range of voluntary welfare institutions, reformatory practices centred on the separation of family members, the expectation of heavy labour duties and a range of punitive treatments. Such treatments reflected institutional aims to categorise and control inmates in order to eliminate poverty and immorality.

Meanwhile, other scholars have demonstrated that institutional life was far more complex than the uniform ideologies and experiences presented in classical social histories of institutional life. Since Margaret Crowther’s pioneering critique of the workhouse as total institution, which suggested local variance in policy and practice, scholars have increasingly questioned the orthodoxy of uniform institutional ideology and experience. More recently, drawing on a range of methodological approaches, scholars such as Jane

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Hamlett, Ginger Frost and Charlotte Newman have emphasised just how variable institutional experiences were in light of the regional contexts in which institution operated, as well as the agency of officials and inmate populations.20

The history of children’s welfare

Like the workhouse, the Victorian children’s institution has been presented as a bleak and oppressive establishment. As historians have observed, the publication of Oliver Twist (1837) as well as several scandals about the treatment of inmates in workhouses and other institutions did little to challenge such a pronounced view of the austere nature of the children’s welfare institution.21 For families placing children in care, the children’s institution was a shameful, traumatic and deeply disturbing prospect. In most cases, however, placing children in care was crucial in enabling families to survive during times of economic hardship.22

By examining a range of institutional sources, historical research on the children’s institution has focussed on contemporary notions of ‘problem families’, ideal models of citizenship, and institutional ideologies that aimed to rescue and reform children.23 In doing so, scholarship has drawn attention to the apparent disconnect between institutional aims to care for children and seemingly draconian practices. Historians have highlighted policies that severed the parent-child relationship in order to effect the moral transformation of the

21 Frost, Victorian Childhoods, p. 123; Newman, ‘To Punish or Protect’, p. 123;
welfare child and eradicate hereditary pauperism. Other scholarship too, has shown that children’s treatment within the welfare institution imitated the castigatory practices implemented by other institutions to reform more problematic populations, including industrial schools for juvenile delinquents and reformatories for the morally deviant.

Yet, contemporary discourse in the nineteenth century demonstrated changing attitudes towards the significance and meaning of childhood. This shift was reflected in the growth of child psychology and social development theories. Meanwhile, the state also played an important role in the regulation of mother-child relationships and parental responsibilities, which further shaped and reinforced ideas about childhood and the family and were embedded in a range of social policies that impacted on working-class families.

Such changing attitudes and policies about childhood and family relationships inevitably shaped the provision of state and voluntary welfare. Recent scholarship has thoroughly investigated this connection. However, the

29 For literature about childhood, families and welfare provision, see, A. Fletcher and S Hussey (eds.) Childhood in question: Children parents and the state (Manchester, 1999); Lawrence and Starkey, Child welfare and social action in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; Hugh Cunningham, Children and childhood in western society since 1500 (Harlow, 2005); C Heywood, A history of childhood: Children and childhood in the West from medieval to modern times (Cambridge, 2001); Frost, Victorian Childhoods; Joanne Bailey, Parenting in England, 1760–1830: emotion, identity and generation (Oxford 2012); Claudia Nelson, Family Ties in Victorian England
impact of these changes on childcare practices has received much less attention in research. Statutory officials concerned with the provision of child welfare in the later nineteenth-century, such as Jane Nassau Senior, debated the appropriate environments in which to home children, as well as the various facets of care necessary to ensure their emotional and physical wellbeing. As Lydia Murdoch has shown, these debates prompted a departure from caring for child inmates in large, barrack-style welfare institutions. Instead, the ‘cottage home’ system became a superior model, which strove to provide child inmates with a sense of home not far removed from ‘natural’ home-life in the mid to late decades of the nineteenth century.

This system, also known as the ‘family model’ of care, gained support from reformers from the 1870s. As Felix Driver has demonstrated, however, this ‘family model’ of moral training had first been adopted by an agricultural colony for juvenile delinquents in Mettray, France in January 1840. This model of care played an important role in debates over the treatment of criminal and poor children in Britain later in the century. The ‘cottage-home’ system sought to arrange institutions into smaller homes which, when grouped together, created a model village, such as Barnardo’s village of cottage homes in Ilford, established in 1876.

As Stephen Soanes rightly asserts, the cottage home system imbued the institutional site with a sense of privacy, superficial familiarity and security of home, as well as the domesticity and sociability of the family unit. For the


34 Murdoch ‘From Barrack Schools to Family Cottages’, p. 147.

35 Soanes, ‘“The Place was a Home from Home”’, p. 113.
WSS, the ‘cottage-home’ system purposefully intended to bridge the gap between the institution and the biological family home as this thesis demonstrates. The thesis asks how the WSS imagined the institutional ‘home’ and examines practices aimed at realising ‘homeliness’ within the institution. As chapter three demonstrates, ‘home’ meant providing a sense of permanency, security, privacy, familiarity and comfort to inmates.

These homes usually housed a smaller number of children than the large barrack-type institutions that preceded them. Matrons and masters cared for inmates, adopting the names of ‘mother’ and ‘father’ in the homes. WSS cottage homes usually housed between 6 and 20 children, whilst Barnardo’s housed between 20 and 40 children. In addition to the cottage homes, the WSS opened a number of larger institutions, though these were usually for the purpose of training older inmates. This family model of caring for children can be seen as similar to boarding-out systems of foster care, which allowed the institution to retain authority over children. By the late nineteenth century, boarding out and the ‘cottage home’ systems were the preferred options for institutional care for a number of larger children’s charities including Barnardo’s, National Children’s Homes (NCH), and the WSS.

Such changes in welfare practices are perhaps unsurprising, given the increasing ideological importance attached to ‘home’ during this period. Several historians have drawn attention to the increasing significance and longevity of the ideals of community and family-based systems of care of vulnerable and sick groups in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Welshman has pointed to the importance of the home in the provision of community care and welfare, whilst Soanes argues that the cottage-home system can be seen as an early example of the statutory and voluntary drive for creating home and family-centred care.\textsuperscript{40} These types of care continue to be best-practice models to this day for all types of vulnerable and dependant groups.\textsuperscript{41}

Despite state and voluntary intentions to provide the welfare child with a semblance of ‘home’, few studies have extended beyond the study of discipline and reform to consider on the emotional aspects of care provision for children. There is a growing consensus that the history of institutions should be considered in terms of what they afforded inhabitants, rather than through the lens of discipline and reform. A body of literature has recently addressed this question by examining the material culture of residential institutions and considering how far such environments could be perceived as a home for inmate populations.\textsuperscript{42} These approaches are particularly valuable in recovering the history of individuals and their personal experiences – children in care are ubiquitous in history – but their experiences are rarely told. The voice of the destitute child and the child in care is even more seldom heard than that of the labouring poor or other marginalised groups in history.

The existing model of the children’s institution depicts inmates’ experiences as largely totalising in nature. Historians have concluded that there was little positive emotional and social care provided in the institution and that children’s daily life was characterised by uniforms, identification numbers and

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\textsuperscript{41} Best practice models of childcare provision today centre on adoption, foster care or reunification with family following intervention. Other legislation has made possible special guardianship orders, but the effectiveness of this model has not yet been evaluated. See Di McNeish and Sara Scott, \textit{What Works in Achieving Adoption for Looked After Children: An Overview of Evidence for the Coram/Barnardo’s Partnership} (2013), pp. 1–31.

\textsuperscript{42} Hamlett, Hoskins and Preston, \textit{Residential Institutions}.
\end{flushleft}
short haircuts that contributed to the erasure of individuality.\textsuperscript{43} Scholars have also emphasised the stringent rules that shaped behaviour within the institution: obedience, deference, silence and self-effacement dominated children’s social experiences.\textsuperscript{44} For many inmates, punitive, draconian and even brutal treatment was encountered at the hands of the uncaring institution and cruel institutional officials.\textsuperscript{45} A closer look at evidence however, suggests that this is only one strand of the story.

**Home, family and belonging in the institution**

By asking different questions of surviving sources, another narrative emerges that highlights that children’s experiences of care were varied. At times, children could experience a sense of closeness, connectedness and intimacy, as well as a sense of devotion and attachment to institutional staff and co-residents. To acknowledge that institutional experiences could be meaningful and positive, however, is not to suggest that this was the case for all children in residential care or some children all of the time. The policies and practices of voluntary childcare institutions in the nineteenth century were varied, with little legal standardisation or regulation. For a nationwide organisation such as The Waifs and Strays Society with over 108 homes across the country by 1911, records suggest that the practices in each home were guided by the Society’s overarching mission and values, but, that relative autonomy existed for homes to set their own routines and childcare practices. As a result, children’s experiences of residential care, even within the same institution, could be varied and their understanding and memory of care were diverse.

This thesis seeks to redress the gaps in understanding the material and interpersonal experiences of care within the Victorian children’s institution. By challenging the existing model that meaningful childhood and familial experience cannot be adequately reproduced within institutional settings, this work highlights how the children’s institution attempted to create a sense of home, familial-type relationships and attachment within residential sites. There is a growing interest in the study of material culture, which the following chapters address. This has had important implications for studies of both home and family.\(^{46}\) Scholars using archaeological and material approaches to examine the institution have questioned how the physical environment determined the treatment and experiences of their inmates.\(^{47}\) Such studies have highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in shedding new light on how architectural form, interior decoration and design reflected contemporary


anxieties and attitudes towards institutional inhabitants and how these aspects could structure and shape resident’s time in care.

Meanwhile, since the affective turn scholars have produced critical studies of affect and intimacy in working-class culture. Such studies impact on the understanding of the interpersonal relationships within the family and community over the course of the life cycle and how this shaped individuals’ sense of attachment, belonging and identity. Scholars have been slower to address the interpersonal and emotional history associated with the provision of institutional care. In particular, little work has touched on the ways in which institutions aimed to protect, care for, nurture, comfort and nurse inmates beyond material provision.

This thesis seeks to fuse these two scholarships by bringing affect and material culture to an established literature on children’s welfare in order to challenge orthodoxies of institutional childhood in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. Using The Waifs and Strays Society as a case study, the thesis raises questions about how nurture was promoted and experienced in the Victorian children’s institution by examining key narratives of home, family and belonging. In particular, this study asks how the institution was constructed and perceived to be a home; how staff members and co-residents could be cast and understood as family members; and how institutional practices could offer inmates a sense of belonging, intimacy and meaningful care that could help shape a broader sense of identity over the life course. Home in this thesis then, is interpreted to mean domestic living space, in which material goods and spatial arrangement plays a crucial role in demonstrating the complex social and cultural identities of its inhabitants.


History of The Waifs and Strays Society

The WSS was founded in 1881, by Edward de Montjoie Rudolf, a Sunday School teacher in Lambeth. His mission was to provide outcast, friendless and destitute children of the Church of England faith, with care, protection and a ‘natural home life’ in which ‘family life would be preferable to institutional life’.\(^\text{50}\) Rudolf established an Executive Committee, responsible for all the charity’s policies, with Archbishop Tait of Canterbury assuming position as the President of the charity. A General Committee was also established, made up of 196 clergymen across the country and 24 laymen. This committee was responsible for the general administration and activities of the organisation.

The Society expanded rapidly. In 1882, the Society opened its first home in Clapton and by 1895, when Queen Victoria became a patron, the Society had cared for over 2,000 children in a total of 65 homes. By 1920, there were 108 homes that had cared for a total of 4,269 children.\(^\text{51}\) To ensure the charity’s effective management and operation, a diocesan arrangement that mimicked the structure of the Anglican Church was adopted. These committees were responsible for establishing two homes for each sex in each diocese. This formation helped to establish a local and national network of supporters made up of clergymen and their congregations.\(^\text{52}\) These committees deferred authority to the Executive Committee, and ultimately Rudolf, who remained Director until 1919.\(^\text{53}\)

Like other major children’s charities operating at the time, including Barnardo’s, the NCH and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), the WSS played a crucial and active role in helping to develop statutory policies on child welfare.\(^\text{54}\) Rudolf lobbied for the compulsory government registration and inspection of children’s homes in 1902, for example, to safeguard children’s wellbeing.

As a voluntary organisation, the WSS depended on the goodwill of its supporters to ensure continued operation. Public supporters gave most of the

\(^{51}\) Ibid., pp. 5, 7.
\(^{53}\) Ibid., p. 125.
\(^{54}\) Ibid., pp. 1–2.
income of the charity in its first forty years voluntarily, with an increasing number of grants from official sources during the first decades of the twentieth century. In raising funds, the institution adopted a number of common techniques employed by other institutions operating during this period, including sales of work, pledges, legacies and large campaigns to restrict funds to certain projects. The Society also elicited donations from child supporters – the next generation of donors – by establishing a Children’s Union (CU) – a fundraising branch of wealthy child patrons who raised funds solely for disabled children in WSS care. Like Lucy L’s mother, most relatives were unable to contribute the 5 shillings per week needed to cover the cost of inmates’ care. Some relatives did send nominal amounts to the Society, but very often, sporadically.

The WSS’s mission, policies and practices were typical in comparison to other large children’s welfare institutions. The WSS has been chosen as a case study in this thesis because no in depth study of the Society has yet been published whereas Barnardo’s history is well trodden. It has also been selected as a case study because of its rapid growth between 1881 and 1914 and its nationwide approach to the provision of care. Like a number of other historians of institutional welfare, I have adopted a single-institutional approach to examine the history of nineteenth-century children’s welfare. Such an approach helps to situate individual policies and practices within a broader context of nineteenth and twentieth-century welfare provision and also offers a valuable snapshot of the lives of institutions and their inmates at specific points in time.

The thesis is not concerned with providing a comprehensive survey of all institutional development in Britain, nor is it intended to be a comparative study of the processes associated with statutory and voluntary welfare provision during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Instead, it questions WSS policies, practices and the provision of care, which were characteristic of many other welfare institutions of the time, to extrapolate conclusions about the institutional child in the nineteenth century.

55 de Montjoie Rudolf, Everybody’s children, p. 8.
Methodology

In order to get at inmate’s experiences of residential care, this thesis uses a range of methodological approaches to consider notions of home, family and belonging embedded in institutional ideology and in the practical provision of childcare. Whilst notions of reform and training of inmates underpinned the mission of many voluntary children’s institutions and is therefore impossible not to acknowledge, this is not the central focus to this research. Instead, in line with enduring calls to produce history from below, I draw on scholarship from social history, design history, archaeology, sociology and human geography to help unpick and consider institutional ideals and inmates’ experiences of home, family and belonging.

The study uses a combination of empirical, visual and narratives sources. I use both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods to examine a range of institutional sources, including fundraising literature in magazines, guides to providing childcare such as staff handbooks, inventories, punishment books and donation records. The use of institutional fundraising literature has been central to identifying the WSS’s aims, mission and values in both their policies and practices. It is therefore important to note that whilst institutional fundraising literature must be considered in light of its propaganda purpose to raise money and promote specific ideologies, other records consulted in this thesis, such as inmates’ individual case files and personal correspondence provide insight into the lived experiences of inmates within the institution.

When read in conjunction with each other, these sources also reveal the tension between institutional ideology and practice. Use of photographs and floor plans of institutional interiors is valuable to assessing inmates’ physical institutional experiences. Alongside institutional records, textual analysis of individual case files forms a large part of evidence. The majority of case files contain personal letters, often from parents to children, from children to relatives, and from children to the institution after they had left. As Lucy’s case file highlights, not all personal correspondence has survived. However, it is usually

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possible to piece together the dialogue through examining responding letters, references in later letters, and other institutional notes.

This study has been based on examination of the evidence contained in a total of 691 case files of children that entered WSS care between 1881-1914. This case file sample has been developed by examining the records of children that entered the Society’s care during the months of January and June, at five year intervals: e.g. 1881, 1885, 1890, 1895 etc. I chose to look at children entering in the winter and summer months to build a sample that took into account seasonality especially in terms of the relationship between economic hardships faced during harsher weather. I chose to examine case files at five-year intervals between 1881 and 1914, from the Society’s foundation to when WSS practices changed in response to the start of The Great War. This allowed me to chart the Society’s growth as an institution and their responses to a range of changes within the welfare provision context, including the initial impact of war on the provision of care. The first names and initials of surnames have been used to identify these children.

I have also accessed 146 complete case files digitally through the Hidden Lives Revealed (HLR) website, a project which intended to digitise and showcase the lived experience of WSS children.57 Reference is made to these case files in citations by the use of ‘HLR’, which precedes the case file number throughout the thesis. Here, only initials are used to refer to these children. In addition to these case files, I have also used summaries of case files for a total of 1,850 disabled children, kindly provided to me by the archivists at The Children’s Society Record and Archive Centre. Although this source does not offer full transcription of the contents of each case file, it provides a valuable record of the circumstances of the children, the reason for application and family background, and a summary of the case history that offers a glimpse into the child’s journey through institutional care. For the selection of all case file material, no further limitations have been made and therefore all regions across the UK are represented in the sample, rather than a London-centric approach. The use of initials for inmates in WSS care removes some identifying features, in

57 http://www.hiddenlives.org.uk/
order to comply with data protection, confidentiality and ethical codes of conduct.

The thesis is divided into five chapters, and begins with family as the focal point of study. Moving beyond the study of institutional constructions of ‘problem families’, chapter one examines the Society’s ideal of family in the institution. The chapter takes a broader notion of relatedness to examine the WSS’s negotiation and understanding of family as an imagined entity within the immediate space of the institution. The importance of models of family and familial-type relationships embedded in institutional ideology highlights the Society’s focus on notions of nurture and broader aspects of emotional and pastoral care for inmates. But what became of inmates’ relatives and their role in caring for children? Whilst many contemporary institutions sought to sever relatives’ contact and access to children during institutional confinement, and even beyond, the WSS were less consistent in their policies of severance allowing many relatives to remain in contact with inmates in the institution. Chapter two proceeds to examine the agency of inmates’ relatives whilst their children were in homes. This includes the tensions in authority that institutional limitations regarding contact and access prompted. The chapter highlights how far relatives accepted institutional policies and responded to limitations or restrictions in their access to children. In doing so, the chapter also highlights how far the institution was willing to negotiate with welfare recipients and adapt established policies to meet demands and resolve conflicts.

Despite increasing focus on the material culture and domesticity in the institution, the children’s institution has largely been omitted from this scholarship. Chapter three therefore, moves from the study of family to examine how the institution sought to create a sense of homeliness for inmates. Using a combination of visual and textual sources, the chapter unpicks the Society’s ideal of ‘home’ and highlights how far this model could be replicated within the institutional space. By considering ‘home’ in the context of the children’s welfare institution, the chapter complicates the institutional narrative that positions children largely as unindividualised subjects – the institution was also an imagined and ideological space that children could experience and shape in multiple ways. Repeated calls by historians to further unearth the voices of the poor in archival material – or history from below – has driven the focus of study
for the final two chapters of this thesis. In particular, the voices of children have often been difficult for the historian to recover, like the experiences of other marginalised and dependant groups such as, disabled groups, poor families entering the workhouse or those classed or ‘fallen women’ entering a range of reformatories.

Chapter four considers the social, interpersonal and emotional aspects in the institution. The chapter argues that given the overall mission of children’s welfare institutions to create moral and productive citizens, the implementation of reformatory and disciplinary practices was just one side of the coin to achieving this. Institutions also acknowledged that social and emotional nurture through the cultivation of positive interpersonal relationships were crucial facets of childcare they were responsible for providing. The chapter examines institutional ideologies that positioned key moments of celebration, treats and other practices as a means of promoting a sense of belonging, nurture and attachment for inmates. These key moments help provide a lens through which questions regarding children’s opportunities to cultivate positive and meaningful social experiences within the institution can be raised.

The final chapter continues this focus, by examining aftercare models used by the institution. This contributes to histories of children’s experiences by examining the institution’s aftercare ideals and the support offered to former inmates in practice. Instead of concentrating exclusively on the training, employment and survival of former inmates, analysis of aftercare ideals suggests that welfare institutions were well aware of the desirability of supporting youths, emotionally, financially and materially, long after their discharge. This complicates the narrative of the uncaring Victorian welfare institution. By primarily analysing former inmates’ letters ‘home’ – both letters purporting to be from children printed in fundraising literature and letters from former inmates contained in case files – the chapter measures the gap between what the WSS aspired to achieve in terms of providing long-term and enduring support, the mechanisms it put in place, and its success in practice. The chapter also demonstrates that case-file letters from former inmates speak tellingly of

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58 See papers from the History from Below conference uploaded on www.manyheadedmonster.wordpress.com
children’s understanding and their responses to their time in residential care, and how far children imagined the institution as a home and a family after discharge.

This study seeks to change the way in which we think about Victorian institutional childhood, which has commonly been seen as negative and oppressive. The thesis demonstrates that historical research needs to move away from interpreting institutional experiences purely through a model of reform and discipline, which can be unhelpful in thinking about the more complex and broader role institutions functioned in providing care to inmate populations. Similarly, whilst the study of institutional material culture has been particularly valuable in shedding light on more nuanced ways of evaluating institutional experience, the thesis argues that a greater focus is needed on the social and emotional aspects associated with the provision of care that welfare organisations, at the very least, purported to offer.

The study of interpersonal relationships within the institution offers an opportunity to recover the voices of children and consider the experiences of marginalised, vulnerable and dependant groups, which have often been difficult to address. A history of interpersonal relationships within the children’s institution is particularly topical following recent welfare cuts and press reports about children’s homes and child abuse. This study helps to locate anxieties about children’s nurture in broader historical context and unpicks shifting ideas about children’s homes and the roles they should perform.
CHAPTER ONE

Narratives of family in institutional ideology

Historical research on the ways in which family has been defined has largely focussed on the examination of the biological family and loosely related individuals inhabiting the same residence. The term ‘family’ has also been used to describe other forms of social relationships throughout European history, including the bonds maintained between unrelated individuals: friends, patrons, carers, neighbours and other members of local communities. Scholars have acknowledged that the elements that constitute the family not only include those social groups tied by blood or marriage, but also other long-term and short-term relationships. These relationships can be based on contractual arrangements, formal, authoritative responsibilities, as well as the emotional bonds formed through reciprocal, interpersonal relationships.

Other research has offered more abstract narratives of alliances and cultures of ‘relatedness’, including the anthropomorphic potential of the family: specifically the ways in which children have identified domestic pets as family members. Recent work has also called


61 For other understandings of ‘relatedness’, see Janet Carsten, After Kinship (Cambridge, 2004); Janet Carsten, Culture of Relatedness: new approaches to the study of kinship (Cambridge, 2000). For anthropomorphic readings of the family see Becky
for the renegotiation of definitions of family relationships, kinship and friendship, and subsequently their application to more diverse social relations in order to understand a broader ‘enmeshed social culture of relatedness’.

Scholarship on residential welfare provision has questioned the interactions and relationships between institutional authorities, inmates and their relatives. Within the context of children’s welfare provision, literature has drawn attention to institutional constructions of biological relatives as ‘problem families’. Institutional interactions with supposed problem families, as well as policies that severed the parent-child relationship in order to achieve children’s moral transformation, are consequently branded as controversial and dishonest by historians in light of longstanding metanarratives that posit the child as victim of both the problem family and the uncaring institution. Moreover, since some institutional practices aimed to disintegrate familial ties, relatives’ attempts to maintain contact with inmates do not usually feature as significant focal points in scholarship on welfare provision.

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The critical tendency to evaluate these controversial child welfare policies and practices has frequently obscured opportunities to raise more subtle questions in the reading of institutional documents. Scholarship has often neglected to engage with sources that present institutional ideologies beyond narratives of problem families, children as victims and institutions as heartless and draconian. Institutional policies and practices that centred on the nuances of day-to-day institutional living and inmate experience have too commonly been overlooked. Nevertheless, many historians have argued children’s emotional experiences of care were inadequate, with little sense of home, family life, interpersonal relationships and support offered to inhabitants.66

Despite calls to explore the broader social meanings of relatedness and familial-type relationships, historians have given little consideration to the role of family, as both a tangible and imagined entity in institutional life. The following two chapters explore the WSS’s negotiation and understanding of family and its role both inside and outside the immediate space of the institution. Since many children’s relatives were still alive during their time in care, I will use the terms WSS/institutional family and biological family/relatives to distinguish the different models of family I refer to. I also use the terms related and relatedness in the chapter broadly, meaning a sense of connectedness and belonging, rather than relationships based solely on blood ties.

This chapter draws attention to the importance of family in the WSS ideology, beginning with the welfare institution’s understanding of their responsibility in the provision of childcare. The emphasis on familial and familial-type relationships both within and beyond the institution highlights the Society’s focus on notions of nurture and broader aspects of emotional and pastoral care for inmates. I argue that the responsibility to provide emotional support and a sense of connectedness was far more complex and entrenched in both institutional ideology and practice than previous historiography has credited. The chapter proceeds to highlight WSS expectations regarding the role that biological family members were to assume whilst children were in the

66 Abrams, The Orphan Country, p. 59. These questions do not feature significantly in the analytical scope of much scholarship, and yet similar suggestions have been made about the emotional quality of institutional life. See also, Hollen Lees, The Solidarities of Strangers.
charity’s care, by analysing the types of contracts employed by the institution for admitting children. I argue that, like many other institutions operating at the time, the WSS was concerned with establishing their authority as principal carers of inmates, thereby displacing the role of biological relatives. Chapter two further assesses how far relatives navigated their loss of authority and the points of tension that this practice raised.

To acknowledge that ideas of family pervaded institutional ideology, however, is not to suggest that WSS ideals were translated successfully into practice. Few inmates were likely to have understood or experienced a sense of closeness and familial intimacy with either institutional staff or their biological relatives whilst in care. Nonetheless, the study of ideologies of family that were promoted in institutional literature and fundraising magazines is important for understandings the issues of responsibility, authority, intimacy and interpersonal relationships that have been raised in existing research on the family and on the welfare institution. This chapter demonstrates that the WSS’s concept of family traversed various dimensions of relatedness based on contractual duty, social and moral obligation, blood ties, friendship and interpersonal bonds.

**The importance of family relationships**

The late nineteenth century sustained idealisation of the family in general as the core of society, despite significant changes in the law, such as divorce. In practice, these changes confirmed shifting attitudes regarding the meaning and value of familial relationships. Reformist discourse on welfare provision reflected and reinforced the significance of the family unit on children’s emotional development. It called for innovative welfare methods that bestowed a greater importance on the family unit and familial-type models of care. The policies and practices of state and voluntary organisations were shaped by these

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demands, and increasingly included intervention in and assistance for families, as well as the development of early forms of preventive welfare.

NSPCC practices that centred on the inspection of perceived problem families helped to keep families intact through rigorous assessment and provision of their material needs. These practices also focussed on the investigation and monitoring into allegations of child cruelty, rather than children’s immediate removal to institutional care. A drive to provide a higher standard of individual and emotional care in larger public institutions is also recorded in child welfare debates and institutional practice. Whilst biological relatives were rarely afforded flexibility in visiting rights to maintain contact with children in residential care, the trend to house inmates in small cottage homes was a direct response to the perceived need to create a sense of family for young inmates.

Like other welfare institutions, the WSS contributed to contemporary debates, which criticised large workhouses and orphanages that failed to provide children with a basic level of emotional care. The Society lamented the inadequacy of interpersonal relationships within most other institutions, arguing that children were left with ‘an absolute want of knowledge of the ways of family life’. To counteract this, the WSS positioned ‘family life’ – that is, the social, moral, interpersonal and emotional habits and obligations associated with daily life within the family unit – as a crucial element for children’s development. As such, the theme of family life appeared regularly as a significant subject of concern within their monthly magazines.

Institutional magazines intended for a public audience of supporters and potential donors were a key feature of many fundraising organisations, and were used to promote their ideals, policies and practices, as well as their success. One article proclaimed its importance as the ‘natural element’ and ‘ideal life for a

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child’. The Society stated that the notion of family life ‘should always be kept in view by those who undertake the responsibility of moving a child from its surroundings’. As another feature urged, by imitating the family unit within the institution, the Society aimed to teach children, ‘the simple requirements, habits and duties of family life’ that they believed were lacking in the childcare regimes of larger workhouse and orphanages.

The religious identity of the Society helped shape their understanding of the elements associated with family life and familial relationships. Established by Rudolf, the Society’s ideology and practices were influenced by the Evangelicalism of the founder, a former church minister and Sunday School teacher who assumed a dominant role in managing most aspects of WSS work. Like the literature of many other welfare institutions, WSS monthly magazines emphasised the evangelical sentiments associated with the rescue, conversion, and salvation of children. Furthermore, the Society justified its welfare practices as inherent Christian duty. One article confirmed that the Society, as a Christian and Church of England organisation, ‘felt that a great responsibility had been placed upon them by the blessed Lord Himself…to take care of all these children left in that destitute condition and surrounded by so vile an environment’. The WSS argued that the children they saved were a ‘memorial of Christ’s love: they were emblems of Him who, being eternal God, became for our sake a little child’.

The Society also used Christian gospel to polarise differences between right and wrong parenting and family duty, as well as the need for the Society’s intervention. WSS literature cast the abandonment of children as a sin, whilst the use of emotive language to describe children stressed their helplessness and innocence. The Society argued that children were worthy of compassion and benevolence because of their status as ‘God’s little ones’ and ‘poor helpless inheritors of sorrow and sin’. Meanwhile, the Society highlighted the need for providing children with a sense of home and family life. One article argued that

77 ‘“Waifs and Strays” at Birmingham’, Our Waifs and Strays (November, 1893), p. 171.
given the perceived ‘presence of evil in a child’s heart’ and their ‘difficulty of doing right’, the only way to morally reform children was to ‘make them happy; to surround them with wholesome influences’. The Christian home and family that the Society sought to provide aimed to guarantee a happy and moral childhood. Such narratives were commonplace in the Evangelical mission to rescue waifs. Anna Davin’s research on waif stories highlights reformers’ use of the Evangelical conception of original sin in the story of children’s conversion and moral reformation. She argues that it is the philanthropy of earnest clergymen that provide homes to these waifs that ultimately facilitate their transformation, morally as well as socially, in becoming exemplary citizens.

Childhood, the Society argued, was ‘a holy thing’ that should be honoured with favouring children with ‘happy homes, sweet with the rich results of the loving nurture and parental care’. Within this model, the family was positioned as a sacred institution and ‘one of the leading features of what He ordered and intended…for the welfare of the human race’. The magazine outlined the Society’s responsibilities to institutional residents, which included providing them with ‘the blessing of a good home…parents who cared for them…and to bring them up in God’s way’. Statements such as these indicate that the Society believed that family life facilitated children’s development and transformation into righteous and moral citizens. As Davin argues, Christian family values such as love, respect, morality, discipline, humanity and obligation were also promoted in waif stories as the principal features by which Evangelical reformers could achieve children’s reform.

The notion of family was significant in delineating codes of behaviour within the institutional home. The Society claimed that few people ‘really appreciate[d] the sacredness and everlastingness of family ties’, and thus, the family should be the unit in which children ‘must knit fast the bonds of mutual love, respect, and helpfulness, that the whole world cannot break in sunder’.

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84 ‘Waifs and Strays” at Birmingham’, p. 171.
Since children’s biological families were presented as largely inadequate or unable to provide protection, nurture and guardianship, the Society was required to fulfil this duty. The ideal family unit offered children a network of support that they could turn to for emotional, material and financial support at various stages of the life cycle to ensure they maintained independence and quality of life. Later chapters demonstrate that the Society aimed to imitate this network of support, if only on a social and emotional basis, when longer-term financial support of inmates was not considered sustainable.

**Constructions of family within the institution**

WSS fundraising literature further highlighted the Society’s ideologies and practices in establishing a sense of family within institutional homes. The WSS family was shaped by the household structure of the institution, and composed of staff members and other co-residents. This family unit helped inmates benefit from being ‘brought up with other children, and guarded by the mother-feeling’ of WSS staff. The Society also believed that permanency of inmates within the institutional home helped children to imagine their co-residents as family. Permanency also allowed the WSS a greater chance to ‘reform’ inmates in their care.

Contracts that required relatives to place children in care for an agreed number of years achieved this ideal in some cases. Permanency provided the institutional family unit with a sense of stability and security, which in all likelihood, was lacking for many of the children admitted to WSS care on account of parental poverty. Furthermore, constancy in family unit might offer children a sense of belonging and bond with a particular group of individuals, including staff members responsible for caring for them. This feature, alongside admission to WSS care and the duration that children spent in the institutional environment, helped constitute a sense of identity and relatedness for inmates.

The time each child spent in a single WSS home, however, was not always as permanent as the Society desired. Residential homes catered for set age groups, and therefore, children often experienced different stages of childhood in varying environments with correspondingly different co-residents.

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88 See case file 186, Agreement form for the child to be in the Society’s care, 13/6/1884.
and staff (appendix 1). The turnover of staff also shaped household composition and could disrupt the sense of family within the homes. Behaviour that was considered inappropriate by staff members could similarly result in children’s discharge or transferral to other homes and consequently the loss of unity and collapse of interpersonal bonds between residents. The transferral of children between WSS homes because of apparent bad behaviour, however, appears to be quite infrequent in the case file sample.

Nevertheless, the Society arranged for Frederick S. to be transferred when he was aged 12, having been in care for the past five years. A report from the institutions’ medical officer stated that although his conduct was ‘fairly good’, he was ‘not a clean boy in habit and not very nice minded’. The medical officer suggested that Frederick was probably ‘defective’ and expressed concern at him being around other children. A report from the institutions’ medical officer stated that although his conduct was ‘fairly good’, he was ‘not a clean boy in habit and not very nice minded’. The medical officer suggested that Frederick was probably ‘defective’ and expressed concern at him being around other children. Shortly after his transferral, the Society returned him to his mother with the advice that he be committed to a special institution for children of low intelligence and mental disabilities in the local Earlsfield area. Inmates often had little control or choice over the institutional family composition, and it is likely that for many residents, the interpersonal relationships they forged, despite the WSS’s intentions, were often transient.

WSS literature promoted the ideal that children admitted to their care became part of a united family through their shared circumstances and experiences. One article likened children’s ‘adoption’ into the WSS family to religious initiation, describing it as a process where ‘lost ones might be found’ and be provided with the ‘family comforts’ of the ‘Christian homes’, which they ‘would otherwise be deprived’. Articles in monthly magazines that emphasised a shared religious identity within WSS homes also helped to reinforce notions of inmates’ relatedness. One article highlighted the role of the Church in uniting these children, stating that if they ‘knew no natural parents, brothers, or sisters, they should find in the Church a true mother, and in their fellow-Christians, brothers and sisters…’ The statement suggests that, at the very least, children

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89 Case file 10994, Report from Dr Thornton, 12/7/1910.
90 Case file 10994, Report from WSS inspector, 26/7/1910.
91 ‘Naked, and Ye Clothed Me’, Our Waifs and Strays (March 1887), p. 2.
would recognise the Church family as a unit of belonging and identification. Fellow Christians, affiliated with WSS work and beyond, were thus acknowledged as a united family through an alliance of religious identity.

If children’s physical existence within the institution went only some way to provide a sense of unity and family, literature in the Society’s monthly magazine suggests that matrons and masters were tasked with imitating the roles of mothers and fathers to inmates. The WSS argued that it seemed so impossible that the ‘great and enduring home-love, the love of father or mother’, could ever diminish or be withdrawn from children ‘except by death’.94 The cases accepted by the Society, however, suggested that some parents did forsake their responsibilities as parents to love and care for their children. The role of matrons, masters and other home staff, therefore, was to provide children with careful training and nurture whilst in the institutional home. WSS literature reminded readers that ‘every little life has such wondrous potentialities, that for the sake of humanity alone it were wise to protect and nourish it with loving and patient care, knowing that in proportion to the sowing of love and training, so will the harvest be’.95

Implicit in ideas of nurturing children, was the notion of the development of interpersonal relationships between staff and children. Literature in monthly magazines reflected this expectation by substituting the names matron and master for more personal, informal terms of mother and father.96 In doing so, the magazines presented an image of intimate, loving family units that resided in their institutional homes. Another article claimed that the master and matron were not simply viewed as the heads of the household but that they should instead be acknowledged as the ‘heart of the home’.97 Furthermore, no lesser title could effectively convey their position as a ‘life-long mother or father’ in children’s lives.98 Such statements encouraged readers to imagine the Society as a familial network in which individuals were related and where staff and children were considered almost as equals, regardless of their class and status in broader

95 ‘Jottings’, Our Waifs and Strays (June, 1893), p. 81.  
98 Ibid.
society. The statement also indicates the expectation for these bonds to survive long after inmates had left care. The reality of these ideals will be explored in later chapters that assess children’s experiences of care.

Whilst magazines represented the Society’s vision of ideal family life in the institution, children’s use of the terms mother and father to refer to staff is difficult to determine. Nevertheless, several articles in WSS literature claimed that some children did imagine and acknowledge their primary carers as family members. Mrs. B., the matron of St Agnes’ Home, Mirfield was ‘indeed, a mother to the children’, fulfilling her role to care for children so successfully that she was ‘always called “mother” by the children’. Another account described the happy family life at the home in Knebworth, where the training and guidance offered to inmates resulted in ‘making mother, the Home and the little boys quite part and parcel of the happy village life’. Meanwhile, a further account reminded readers that the greatest feature of the institution was that:

…the character of the home, in all its essentials is preserved in each. The “master” and “matron” are regarded as “father” and “mother”, and that years after children had left the homes, endearing epistles are exchanged that show the bond of affection that springs up between staff and children.

The statement highlights the Society’s belief that the ideal care of children within an institutional setting centred on a personal and affective approach rather than simply the strict supervision of children and meting out of basic material needs. Although the use of these terms suggest the Society’s desire to promote inmates’ feelings of familial attachment in the institution, the terms are nevertheless, still formal, especially in contrast to variations on more intimate terms such as ‘Dad’ ‘Mum’, ‘Mama’ and ‘Papa’, which were commonly used at this time.

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100 ‘Notes from the Homes–Knebworth’, Our Waifs and Strays (September, 1889), p. 4.
An account of the appointment of a matron and master for the home in Knoyle offers further detail on the expected duties and characteristics of their roles. ‘The mother and father’ chosen for the positions, the Society stated, were ‘in every way well fitted for the post’. 103 First, the WSS highlighted that they were Church of England members, regular communicants and ‘much respected’. Secondly, the matron and master had a family, and were thus perceived to be well suited to the role of mothering and fathering inmates. Having a nine-year-old child, the couple had proven performance of parenting tasks and responsibilities associated with each role, and in all likelihood, the Society understood them to have successfully created a Christian home and family life for their own child. 104

As potential employees, they appeared to be steady and diligent: the mother had been employed in service with the same family for over fourteen years before marriage as nursemaid and then nurse. It is not clear if she had continued to work after her marriage but it is probable that the Society considered her prior experience in caring for other children, and her individual maternal labour, to be adequate to care for an extended family of seven female inmates. The husband, described as an ‘excellent gardener’, was prevented from working, however, since he was suffering from hip disease. 105 The way the institution presented the matron and master’s circumstances emphasised their suitability for the position: given the husband’s inability to work, their application to become WSS employees suggested that they needed the money. Furthermore, that the husband was prevented from working because of his illness, highlights that he is ‘deserving’ in his unemployment, rather than negligent or ambivalent of his duties to contribute to the family. Moreover, his experience as a gardener was richly suggestive of his ability and affinity to

104 Ibid.
provide nurture and care for children, as well as to teach them the moral lessons of self-sufficiency.

The Society may have believed that the master’s inability to work was an advantage to the home as he could devote more time to those he was responsible for, imparting discipline, authority and Christian example to the girls.106 The handbook for WSS workers directed staff within the homes, suggesting that the mother’s role was to ‘love’ inmates she assumed responsibility for, while the father’s role was to provide ‘Christian example’.107 All staff members were expected to demonstrate a ‘loving interest in the spiritual and the temporal welfare’ of children, which mimicked the gendered roles and responsibilities of parents in biological families.108 Not all WSS homes were staffed by both a master and a matron (appendix 1). This may have been due to the difficulty in finding suitable married couples to take up these positions. Instead, many homes employed a matron for girls’ homes and a master for boys’ homes.

With only a ‘single’ parent caring for inmates, staff members were required to mother or father children. As John Tosh highlights, public schools for boys had little feminine influence and were considered a ‘men-only’ sphere.109 It is possible that some WSS boys’ homes were similar in nature, but it was likely that other female staff, such as nurses or cooks fulfilled a mothering role when needed, especially for younger inmates. Indeed, in larger homes, under-matrons or under-masters were employed to assist with the provision of care and it is probable that the duties associated with mothering and fathering were distributed between staff members.

The Society regularly published photographs of institutional residents and staff in their monthly magazines in order to visualise the institutional family model for readers. These photographs portray the Society’s ideal notions of

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106 ‘Our Twenty–Seventh Home’, p. 5
107 These roles were based on Evangelical models of middle-class family life and responsibilities. See Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes, pp. 317–357.
mothering and fathering, as well as ideas of relatedness between inmates. As propaganda tools, these photographs were, in all likelihood, carefully staged and constructed to convey a specific message or ideal, rather than the experiences within the homes. Nevertheless, these depictions communicated the ideals of family within the institution. One photograph that does not seem to appear in the magazine symbolised the Society’s notion of mothering, depicting a baby with a WSS matron during the early years of the Society’s operation (figure 1). The decision to photograph one of the youngest infants in the institution with the matron indicates that the Society wanted readers to imagine the nurturing relationship between the staff member and child. The placement of the baby on the matron’s lap, as well as her pose that leans forward in a protective and supportive manner reinforces notions of an affectionate, loving relationship between the staff and child. The trace of a smile on the matron’s face further suggests her fondness for the baby or at least some enjoyment from engaging with the baby during the taking of the photograph. The pose of the matron and child also imitates religious iconography depicting the Madonna and child.

This is of cultural significance given that Mary was understood to be the model mother in the Victorian imagination by both Protestants and Catholics alike. Her love and support was symbolic of ideal motherhood and maternal care, whilst her piety also elevated her morality. Moreover, the style and convention of the photograph is in keeping with other photographs that depict ‘real’ families in the nineteenth century, particularly those that depict babies and children with natural backdrops, which were commonly intended for a photograph album. Indeed, that this photograph was not published for the Society’s public supporters, suggests that this may have been indeed for a private ‘family’ album.

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Another photograph published in the fundraising magazine illustrates a larger family at the Knebworth Cottage (figure 2). Here, the matron is photographed with eight boys and the founder of the home, Mr Jones. Informally posed with some distance between them, there seems to be little affection or physical contact between the residents. The matron’s arrangement in the middle positions her centrally, implying her role as the ‘heart’ of the family and home. One boy, however, stands close to the matron who placed her hands on his shoulders. His appearance and height suggest that he is probably the youngest inmate, and perhaps the child most in need of care, nurture, protection and authoritative guidance from the matron. The tactile contact between matron and boy implies both the physical contact of intimacy, as well as authority, in perhaps guiding him to keep still for the photograph. Yet, the matron’s uniform and hat, which distinctly marks her out as an institutional employee, also communicates the contradiction in her role in being caught between affective aims as a ‘mother’ to inmates and authoritative pragmatism as an employee.
Another photograph published in Our Waifs and Strays, represents the Society’s ideal notions regarding the affective sibling-type relationships that might be built between co-residents (figure 3).\textsuperscript{112} An older girl in the St Oswald’s Home, Cullercoats, is photographed sitting with a younger member of the family, with her arm placed affectionately around the younger child. Although formal, the image communicates the apparent attachment between the inmates, and the seemingly caring role assumed by the elder girl over the younger. The caption used to describe the photograph in the magazine, further conflates the roles and identity of the elder girl as both inmate carer or ‘nurse’. Although an inmate herself, the magazine indicates that, as in the biological family, older girls were expected to take on mothering and nurturing roles for younger siblings.\textsuperscript{113}

However constructed these images may have been, given their intended audience of potential donors, these photographs are valuable sources that communicate the Society’s ideals of family structure and relationships that should be fostered within the institution.


\textsuperscript{113} For children as carers, see Ross, \textit{Love and Toil}, pp. 148–158.
Imagining patrons as family

The Society’s idea of relatedness extended beyond the institutional space by incorporating donors and other WSS supporters in the broader model of the institutional family. Instead of seeking to maintain distance between the donor and recipient, the charitable relationship – particularly that of the child donor and inmate – was included within their notion of family. The application of the terms ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ to refer to child donors was a prominent feature within their literature. The Society’s magazine for child donors and supporters was entitled *Brothers and Sisters*, and reinforced the imagined familial relationship between children. That this imagined relationship incorporated children of all social classes and economic backgrounds also indicates that the Society’s interpretation of who constituted ‘family’ was particularly malleable.

The imagined sibling relationship between inmates and child donors depended on an idea of equality between the two groups of children, despite the gap in social experiences of those from wealthier families and those who were welfare dependant. Whilst economic and social difference was integral to the act of empathy and charity, the message entrenched within the literature published in *Brothers and Sisters* was one that called for equality. Children of comfortable
means were repeatedly urged to deny themselves luxuries, in order to give and share with those who lacked. These acts sought to help children imagine themselves, to some extent, as equal. However, this ideal did not negate the non-reciprocal nature of the gift relationship, in which donors were afforded power and status through the act of giving. Nevertheless, the language used in articles encouraged donors to imagine inmates as ‘fellow brothers and sisters’.  

Furthermore, donors were also encouraged to establish personal bonds with inmates by visiting them in the institutional home – a practice that was an entrenched part of institutional life. Through acts of charitable giving and visiting beneficiaries in the homes, the Society believed that ‘children of rich people’ might imagine bonds and a kind of fellowship with institutional inmates. While a rhetoric of imagined kinship existed between child donors and recipients, however, the notion of equality was wholly artificial. Instead, the notion of equality possessed a moral function in teaching and reminding child donors how lucky they were in comparison to those in need.

Other devices were used in *Brothers and Sisters* literature to encourage child donors to acknowledge the difficult plight of WSS inmates, and to reflect readers’ relationships with welfare dependants. One article compared the experiences of a destitute girl to other children who passed her on the way to school, and urged readers to imagine themselves in the destitute position of their counterparts, how poor children felt and how they might respond to those who were more fortunate. The story described how the poor girl compared the school children’s ‘rosy cheeks and their good boots and frocks’ with her own ‘ragged shawl and battered old hat’, which made her ‘feel cross and discontented, and a little envious’. Attempting to teach readers the value of loving others, the story suggested that her feelings would lead her to be unfriendly, rude and hostile to

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114 ‘Words to Children’, *Brothers and Sisters* (February, 1890), p. 4.
those that passed her in the street, and that the only solution to ‘conquer hard
hearts’ was to love her and to give to her charitably.

This device of comparison between waif and reader to elicit empathy and
imagined identification amongst potential supporters, as Anna Davin has argued,
was a commonplace convention used in popular waif stories in the nineteenth
century.119 Such comparison produced distance between the waif and reader,
allowing the reader some distinction in order to assume responsibilities to help
the waif by supporting the Society’s work. Literary devices and tools such as
melodrama, emotive description, direct address of the reader and lengthy use of
narrative, helped to develop reader’s sense of identification, empathy, and
potentially donations.

As Carolyn Burdett asserts, the end of the nineteenth century marked an
end of Victorian sentimentality – that is, in polarised terms, the capability of
being moved by the distress of others, or signs of self-indulgence and weakness
of will.120 Burdett argues, however, that this sensibility was replaced by empathy
– the capacity to feel with another, or the power of identification with the plight
of others.121 Although the term empathy was not first used until 1912 to describe
this feeling, Burdett argues that a range of artistic and cultural products, as well
as psychological literature of the second half of the nineteenth century helped to
develop and theorise this emotional response. WSS articles detailing the plight of
poor children, as well as other popular waif stories, rely on the imaginative
process to produce a feeling of empathy.

As Burdett states, this process includes the imaginative insertion of the
reader into a narrative, the identification with the character or situation which is
experienced as emotionally moving, as well as the projection of the reader’s own
inner experience into the narrative or character, which allows the realisation of
accompanying emotions.122 It is this process of empathy that the WSS hoped
readers might respond to emotionally, thereby eliciting some pledge of support,
whether financial or otherwise.

120 Carolyn Burdett, ‘Is Empathy the End of Sentimentality?’, Journal of Victorian
121 Ibid., p. 260.
122 Ibid., p. 260–270.
Literature in *Brothers and Sisters* served to strengthen familial-type bonds and responsibility between child donors and inmates. Although these relationships were understood as ideals, the magazine stated that some readers responded to the Society’s calls to cultivate closer relationships with those inmates they sought to help. Supporters and donors visited institutional inmates in order to bring them gifts and invitations to sociable events. Members of the Wimbledon branch of the Children’s Union (CU), a WSS membership club for children that helped disabled inmates in St Nicholas’ Home (SNH) visited SNH inmates in 1891 and invited them to an entertainment they performed in 1893, which included playing games and a Punch and Judy show later in the afternoon.¹²³

The establishment of such relationships meant that donors were able to see the ways in which their contributions were helping inmates first hand, whilst also fostering closer relationships with those they supported through direct and personal interaction. The opportunity to visit inmates also enhanced fundraising potential, as CU members were able to experience the rewards of donating and caring for inmates firsthand. Importantly too, it is probable that inmates’ interaction with children from higher social standing aimed to help them to recognise their place in society as well as teaching them to be grateful to these children for being interested in them. Moreover, the WSS believed that the child donors would morally benefit from helping those less fortunate, and that acts of generosity, sympathy and sacrifice would teach children the important Christian lessons of love and compassion and of imagined kinship, despite the divergence of experience and circumstance between donor and recipient.¹²⁴

The frontispiece that appeared at the start of each issue of *Brothers and Sisters* also reminded readers of their relationship with welfare dependants, and

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¹²⁴ A number of fundraising appeals call for children to make small sacrifices for those less fortunate. See ‘Gratitude’, *Our Waifs and Strays* (March, 1906), p. 220.
clearly outlined the perceived responsibilities of supporters (figure 4). The emblem demanded ‘Little Children love one another’. The illustration further complicated the role to be assumed by subscribers. The image portrays a girl and a boy, both well dressed, clean and tidy, offering their hands to support and help a boy knelt between them. The kneeling boy’s ragged clothing indicates his destitute situation, whilst his stance – kneeling and gazing up, almost with a sense of awe at those willing to help – evokes ideas of his vulnerability and desperation, as well as class difference.

Despite the different social status of the children, the image indicates that a sense kinship through compassion might be achieved through the act of extending help to those in need. The positions and poses of the figures also suggest the distance that exists between the children. Neither child helping the poor boy is kneeling at his level to offer support. Instead, their standing positions indicate that they retain authority over him and suggest the existence of a social hierarchy between the figures. The distance between donor and recipient invested a heroic quality to the act of giving. Although the boy’s arm placed on the poor boy’s shoulder implies a sense of care and empathy, the gesture also evokes a sense of the vulnerable and degraded position of the boy in need for readers. Moreover, the contrast in physical appearance serves as a reminder of difference between the figures and suggests that donor and recipient were far from being siblings in a social sense. Instead, the relationship between the figures echoes the authoritative, yet protective and nurturing roles associated with parenthood and the paternalism that underpinned charity in the nineteenth century.

Whilst the Society’s demand for child donors to imagine themselves as siblings to welfare dependants, the act of helping and giving to inmates required child donors to assume mothering and fathering type roles. Mothering and fathering duties centred on the identification and provision of dependants’ needs, achieved through the act of donating. Furthermore, parenting was often associated with sacrificial acts in order to provide those needs to children, and the theme of sacrifice was a central message in literature that called for children’s self-denial. Drawing on Christian rhetoric, readers were urged to imitate the ‘child Jesus’ and ‘give up’ or share with those less fortunate.\textsuperscript{125} One article suggested it was God’s wish for mankind to be selfless, and stated that in order for child readers to ‘learn to be unselfish’ they must ‘form a habit of constantly giving up what is dear to us for the sake of others.’\textsuperscript{126}

Another article reminded readers to follow in the path of Christ, who, if he came to London, might be found ‘lamenting the wretchedness and weeping over the miseries of the helpless little children of the East End slums and

\textsuperscript{125} ‘Words to Children’, \textit{Brothers and Sisters} (February, 1890), pp. 5–6; ‘Words to Children. No. 2’, \textit{Brothers and Sisters} (May, 1890), pp. 22–24.

\textsuperscript{126} ‘Words to Children’, \textit{Brothers and Sisters} (February, 1890), p. 5.
alleys’. Rather than ‘feasting at the rich tables of the West End’, Christ would instead ‘lift children out of their foul environment, and the degradation of sin’. The reference to sin reminded the public readership that it was the fault of poor families that children were in slums in the first place. This was important for two reasons. First, since children were considered innocents in their situation, that with the right training and provision of their needs, this cycle of sin could be ended. Secondly, that the Society was the best organisation to do so – through their ‘correct’ mothering and fathering of children, as well as provision of children’s material needs, which child donors themselves could actively participate in through their financial gifts.

Literature in *Brothers and Sisters* regularly complicated readers’ roles by conflating their relationship as both siblings to and providers/carers of inmates. The Society impelled readers to acknowledge these sibling-type relationships with inmates and to ‘set to work for these poor little brothers and sisters…or, give up what you can, and make them happier’, arguing that by doing ‘good among brethren’ readers would be doing good unto Him. The use of the term ‘brethren’, a Christian term of love, evoked a broader, spiritual meaning associated with the notion of family. The term brethren was commonly used in WSS literature to refer to all fellow Christians, as well as dependant children, who had been initiated into this family through the rituals of baptism, confirmation and religious instruction in the institution.

The idea of child supporters assuming mothering and fathering roles formed part of the broader educational devices employed by a range of charities during the nineteenth century. Charities acknowledged that children were an integral part of their donor network for financial support and importantly, that they would become the next generation of patrons. Consequently, fundraising literature purposely targeted children and sought to inculcate the values of sympathy and charity in young readers, teaching them how to ‘spend’ their money wisely and virtuously. These publications included NCH’s *Our Boys and Girls*, Barnardo’s *Our Darlings, Bubbles*, and *Young Helpers’ Magazine*, and the

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128 Ibid., p. 157.
129 ‘Words to Children’, *Brothers and Sisters* (February, 1890), p. 5.
NSPCC’s Children’s League of Pity Paper.\textsuperscript{130} Many of these periodicals drew on Evangelical rhetoric that sought to train children to recognise their moral and Christian responsibilities to be sympathetic and charitable to those in need. This type of literature developed from a longer-standing tradition of children’s writing, in which morally didactic tones emphasised the virtues of compassion, charity and responsibility within a Christian framework.\textsuperscript{131}

The CU reinforced notions of relatedness beyond an ideological context by uniting child donors visibly, awarding brooches and badges to supporters as symbols of their membership and patronage.\textsuperscript{132} In addition to establishing personal relationships with inmates, CU members were also encouraged to develop relationships with key WSS staff members that promoted a greater sense of relatedness. Directly addressed in \textit{Brothers and Sisters} through affectionate and diminutive terms including ‘my dear little children’ or ‘friend’ by ‘Uncle Edward’, the founder of the Society, readers were urged to write to the Society.\textsuperscript{133} The reproduction of children’s letters in magazines offered donors public recognition of their hard work and commitment to the Society.\textsuperscript{134} One article stated:

\begin{quote}
I hope you will write to me and I shall be delighted to advise you, for I am most anxious to know all my little fellow-workers, and am fond of writing letters to children. You must address your letters, “Uncle Edward, Waifs and Strays Society…”\textsuperscript{135}
\end{quote}

Children’s use of Rudolf’s first name in correspondence helped to personalise their relationship with the founder, whilst the use of the term ‘uncle’ added an affectionate and endearing quality to this relationship. These terms diminished the distance and authority between the founder and children who

\textsuperscript{130} See Swain and Hillel, \textit{Child, nation, race and empire}, pp. 20–21.
\textsuperscript{133} See Edward Rudolf (‘Uncle Edward’), ‘Encouragement’, \textit{Brothers and Sisters} (January, 1904), pp. 1–2.
were only able to contribute small amounts to the Society’s work. The adoption of pseudonyms in charitable literature was not unique to the WSS: Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel highlight that the editor of the NCH children’s magazines addressed readers as ‘Aunt Nancie’.\textsuperscript{136} These practices personalised relationships between donors and institutional figures, allowing subscribers to respond in productive and positive ways to appeals for increasing donations and support.\textsuperscript{137} Moreover, the practice of publishing correspondence served to encourage other readers to write to Rudolf, especially for those that were enthralled by the idea of recognition and praise of their work and their value within the broader family of WSS supporters. Publication of correspondence, in all likelihood, fostered a spirit of competition between readers to increase their support and pledge a lasting commitment to the Society’s work.

The Society used their literature to present a broad familial-type network of supporters of their mission. The apparent absorption of donors into the family fold also served as means of gratification for those who did contribute to their work. Published lists of thanks that named each donor also rewarded children’s patronage and acknowledged their value within the larger family of donors and welfare dependants.\textsuperscript{138} Moreover, printed reports on the progress of individual inmates offered donors an understanding of how their contributions were used to help institutional residents as well as familiarity of WSS children’s circumstances.\textsuperscript{139} These accounts referred to inmates by their first names and sought to provide readers with a sense of immediacy and personal connection that further evoked a notion of relatedness between donor and child.

One article described the transformation of ‘Georgie’ who had been transferred from the Byfleet Home to St Martin’s in Surbiton, stating that ‘one can see but few traces now in his boyish face and figure of the poor, timid, wistful, pathetic little being who came to Byfleet some six or seven years ago’.\textsuperscript{140}

In addition to written accounts, photographs that attested to children’s

\textsuperscript{136} Swain and Hillel, \textit{Child, nation, race and empire}, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{138} ‘Northern Children’s Union’, \textit{Brothers and Sisters} (January 1904), p. 13.
\textsuperscript{139} ‘The Homes for Cripple Children’, \textit{Brothers and Sisters} (January 1904), p. 19.
\textsuperscript{140} ‘St Martin’s Home, Surbiton’, \textit{Brothers and Sisters}, (May 1901), p. 73
transformation, their new-found happiness and well-being served as keepsakes for child readers of their good work and success.\textsuperscript{141} These images were similar in nature to the contrast photographs used by Barnardo that apparently depicted children ‘before’ and ‘after’ care, although historians have highlighted that these were fictional accounts of transformation.\textsuperscript{142} Nevertheless, such accounts encouraged donors to ‘observe’ the ‘transformation’ of inmates enabled by their patronage, and further promoted the notion that donors had developed a meaningful relationship with institutional inmates.\textsuperscript{143}

**Family relationships beyond the institution**

The representation of the composition of the ideal institutional ‘family’ in the Society’s public-facing literature appeared to be fairly simple. However, its construction in practice was much more difficult to achieve. With high demand for places and limited financial resources, the Society had to select which children it adopted into its family carefully. Institutional literature and policies indicates the Society's imagined kinship in the institutional family was underpinned by a scientific approach to charity. This approach enabled the WSS to adopt children completely and judiciously into their imagined family. Policies concerning the admission of children, in particular, demonstrate the Society’s anxiety about the role biological relatives assumed in their definition of ‘family’ and consequently in the lives of inmates. These formal documents sought to establish a fixed set of terms and conditions associated with children’s admission, as well as the authority and rights parents and other relatives possessed over inmates. The contracts also helped the Society to concretely establish the terms upon which children were initiated into the institutional family.

Institutional representations of the families from which they removed children have been well documented by historians. Fundraising literature, photographic representations and narratives of institutions’ operations usually

\textsuperscript{141} ‘Group at St Martin’s Home’, *Brothers and Sisters*, (January 1904), p. 9.
\textsuperscript{143} See, ‘St Agnes’ Home, Croydon’, ‘St. Martin’s Home, Surbiton’; ‘The Bradstock Lockett Home’, *Brothers and Sisters*, (January 1904), pp. 7-10.
presented poor families as feckless characters that lived in deplorable slum conditions, who had little understanding of wholesome home and family life. Moreover, institutional figures castigated these families in their accounts for being neglectful or ambivalent of their children’s welfare. Photographs published of barely nourished children dressed in thin, mismatched rags upon their admission into the institutional home reinforced this image of the endangered child and the problem family. Many written accounts and articles describing typical cases within WSS literature appear to have echoed these conventions of portraying poor families and their children, and were used as a basis to justify their intervention on behalf of children. The use of photographs as a medium to represent children’s apparently shocking circumstances, however, appear to have been less frequently used. A series of photographs taken in 1880s from the Bristol diocese still survive, but it is possible that this practice was discontinued following the controversy surrounding Barnardo’s use of photography.

Despite such representations of poor families, WSS policies demonstrate their apprehension and fear in relieving relatives of their duties and responsibilities towards children and the strategic approaches they adopted to ensure that they did not damage biological families by making them welfare dependant. Regulations regarding the admission of children stated that ‘where it can be avoided it is wiser not to break through the natural tie, which no institutional life can replace to the young child’. Although the message was inconsistent with fundraising literature and photographs that emphasised the urgency to remove children from apparently immoral environments, it helped to justify processes of assessing the merit and deservingness of each application. This approach to measure the worthiness of a case was commonly practiced by

145 Murdoch, Imagined Orphans, pp. 12–43; Koven, ‘Dr Barnardo’s “artistic fictions”’, pp. 6–45.
other voluntary and statutory welfare institutions, as well as the Charity Organisation Society itself, as Gertrude Himmelfarb demonstrated. 147

Like other welfare societies, the WSS used a range of contracts to establish relatives’ roles in inmates’ lives. The application for admission served as a principal contract by which relatives relinquished their rights over children and transferred this power to the Society. 148 The application form required relatives to agree to ‘commit the child wholly to the Society’s care’ and to ‘obey the rules’ relating to their operational practices. These rules included their assent for the Society to baptise, confirm and instruct children in the Protestant faith, for children to be trained as the institution saw fit, and for inmates’ placement in residential homes and employment anywhere across the country. 149 The application form enabled the WSS to assume absolute authority over children, whilst diminishing parental rights. As Deborah Cohen argues, this was vital to individuals that adopted other people’s children. By restricting parental rights and their involvement in children’s lives, adoptive institutions and adoptive families limited reminders of where children came from and the anxiety associated with what their story was. 150

Unlike organisations such as Barnardo’s, and despite applications that appeared to limit parental rights, the WSS did not sever children’s relationships with their relatives as a matter of standard practice. However, a number of practices provided the WSS with the ability to hinder relatives’ capacity to access children easily. Placing children at great distance from their biological family homes helped the Society to separate children from relatives they considered to be immoral or problematic. This clause became a point of tension for relatives who were unwilling to give up contact with their children, as the next chapter examines. Relatives were able to express consent or objection to children’s emigration to Canada, and the case file sample confirms that the

147 See Himmelfarb, Poverty and Compassion, pp. 185–207.
148 Application forms are standardised in form and content throughout the scope of this study. See case file 2, application form to the Waifs and Strays Society, February 1882.
149 See case file 186, Agreement form for the child to be in the Society’s care, 13/6/1884, and question 26 in case file 2, application form to the Waifs and Strays Society, February 1882, which asks if the parents/guardians are ‘willing to commit the child wholly to the care of the Managers of the Home, and to obey the rules in force’.
Society usually respected relatives’ wishes, although there are some cases where relatives, deemed immoral by the Society, appear to have been cajoled into agreeing to emigration.\textsuperscript{151} The application form also stated that applications for admission, which consented to emigration, were favoured.\textsuperscript{152} This caveat most likely placed a great strain on relatives who struggled with little or no resources to agree to a condition they did not desire.

Whilst contracts established the Society’s authority over children placed in care, they also reinforced key elements in the Society’s ideologies: the construction of a sense of family, home and belonging for inmates. Permanency of institutional residency was crucial in facilitating these feelings for inmates. Application forms that mimicked legal contracts helped to initiate children into the WSS family by reinforcing the Society’s absolute authority over inmates as their principal carer. However, these application forms and other documents had no legal standing in practice. As other historians have highlighted, despite parents signing away their rights on slips on application forms and other institutional papers, relatives were entitled to remove children as and when they liked.\textsuperscript{153} However, as Cohen rightly points out, parents were often ill informed or unaware of their rights to do so, and evidence suggests that institutions used this power to their advantage.\textsuperscript{154}

These documents ensured that removing children from institutional care was made as difficult as possible. Contracts that asked parents to relinquish their rights over children, also helped to manage the problem of children’s repeated admission to and removal from care, known as ‘ins and outs’ as Murdoch highlights.\textsuperscript{155} Institutional authorities believed that these repeated depositions were not in the best interests of the child, whose sense of home and family life might be disrupted. Furthermore, other residential inmates could suffer from the

\textsuperscript{151} For examination of consent to emigration, see chapter 2 of this thesis, pp. 72–81.
\textsuperscript{152} The forms required for consent for emigration attest to the importance of parental/next of kin consent before children’s case files were passed over to the Emigration Committee for consideration. Furthermore, correspondence suggests that although the Society and its network of supporters attempted to persuade and influence relatives to give their consent, the WSS usually acknowledged and accepted the objections that relatives made, and in only a very small number of cases, did they disregard these objections.
\textsuperscript{154} Cohen, \textit{Family Secrets}, pp. 119, 123.
\textsuperscript{155} Murdoch, \textit{Imagined Orphans}, pp. 49–52.
instability and contagion, in both physical and moral terms that these children presented. Thus, these contracts thereby sought to diminish the agency and authority of relatives, by discouraging the practice of depositing children in welfare institutions and then reclaiming them when social and economic circumstances allowed. Meanwhile, other policies ensured the confinement of inmates for a set number of years. The Industrial Schools Act, for example, enabled the state’s forcible removal of children from their families, and entrusted their care to a range of statutory and voluntary Industrial Schools until children turned sixteen.156

Thus, these contracts helped the WSS to absorb children into the institutional family in the long term, whilst simultaneously undermining inmates’ biological family. In signing the application form, relatives were expected to relinquish their rights over children, with little contact or access to inmates. The next chapter examines in more detail relatives’ responses to this expectation, and how this worked in practice. In addition, the application form reminded relatives of their liability to repay the Society for all childcare costs, should they wish to remove children. The stated cost of caring for an individual child in WSS care amounted to five shillings per week.157 These terms therefore, defined the limits of familial power over children by demarcating strict terms to which relatives were to adhere.

Despite the Society’s mission to rescue and remove children from undesirable and inadequate circumstances, the Society’s assessment of deservingness of each case ensured that they did not absolve relatives from their obligations to children. Application forms required detailed information

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157 There appears to be some inconsistency in the established rate for the support of a child. 5 shillings appears to be the most commonly stated cost for children’s care, but some early contracts for placing children in care between 1881–1886 indicate that the set rate for payment was 4 shillings. See case file 186, childcare contract, 13/6/1884. Furthermore, the Society’s Handbook indicates that 4 shillings a week was sufficient to care for a child. See *Handbook for workers, Part III* (1904), p. 19. However, the ‘We want’ columns published regularly in *Our Waifs and Strays*, indicate that the cost to support a child for one week was 5 shillings. See ‘We Want’, *Our Waifs and Strays*, (February, 1887), p. 3. Correspondence highlights that relatives were asked to reimburse the Society at a cost of 5 shillings. See case file 7689, letter from Rudolf to Mrs. A., July/August 1900.
regarding families’ backgrounds and circumstances, which formed part of a stringent procedure to make sure that the Society accepted children only when institutional care was a family’s last resort. Analysis of familial income of children’s immediate and extended family helped the WSS assess whether any other relative might instead care for the child, or at the very least, pay for the child’s maintenance within the institution.\textsuperscript{158} Moreover, WSS handbooks reminded staff members that ‘the circumstances of every child have more or less an individual character’, and that ‘great care and discrimination are necessary on the part of the Case Committee’.\textsuperscript{159}

Other guidelines regarding the admission of children suggest that some families applying for welfare assistance inevitably became victims of the Society’s zealous concern not to relieve relatives of their duties towards children. Widows deemed to possess average health and earning capacity were considered by the WSS to ‘be able to support at least two of her children’. The Society did not indicate, however, how much they considered an ‘average’ income to be, nor did they suggest who would be responsible for supervising children whilst the widow worked. As widows were usually the poorest group of the deserving poor, applications forms confirm that widows’ income was low and irregular, and below the sum of five shillings the Society claimed was necessary in order to adequately care for a child.\textsuperscript{160}

Although the Society stated that cases where a widow was left with four or more children were looked on favourably, guidelines stated that usually only one child would be admitted, whilst the Society trusted that ‘relatives would provide for another’. These regulations would have provided little solution for a widow’s dilemma, who would be left to support at least two children. Whilst the


\textsuperscript{159} Handbook for workers, Part III (1904), p. 4.

admission of a single child might have appeased the economic struggle partially, it was likely that it remained impossible for widows to care for the rest of the dependant children as well as earning a living in order to support them.\textsuperscript{161} Nevertheless, the Society boasted that ‘in many cases of this kind, homes have been saved from being broken up, and the woman and her family have been prevented from drifting into pauperism’.\textsuperscript{162} Instead of providing an effective solution for widows struggling to support a large family, the Society’s concern appeared to emphasise the importance of parental and familial responsibility, and the necessity of teaching the widow to ‘maintain herself respectably’.\textsuperscript{163}

Widowers’ applications to admit children, the Society claimed, were ‘far different’ than widows’ applications, given the expectation for fathers to continue to provide as breadwinners:

\begin{quote}
It is confessed on all sides that a man is in a most unfortunate position when he is left a widower with a number of young children, whom he cannot properly look after while he is engaged in earning their support.\textsuperscript{164}
\end{quote}

This statement emphasises the Society’s understanding of the different components of parenting. Although WSS guidelines suggest that they expected widows to continue to support their children financially, this statement indicates that widowers received greater sympathy in their struggle to care for their children. Yet, the Society’s answer for widowers was no more effective than their understanding of how to support widows. Since the Society believed that fathers were more likely to abandon their children by ‘leaving the children on the Society’s hands’, the WSS thought it ‘desirable not to separate a father from his family’.\textsuperscript{165} Instead, the Society suggested that other family members or friends should make arrangements for a respectable and interested person to take charge of the widower’s family and act as housekeeper.\textsuperscript{166} Where this was impossible,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{161} For survival strategies and economic issues faced by widows, see Thomas Sokoll, ‘The household position of elderly widows in poverty’, in Henderson and Wall, \textit{Poor women and children in the European Past}, pp. 207–225.  \\
\textsuperscript{162} \textit{Handbook for Workers, Part III}, pp. 5–6.  \\
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., p. 6  \\
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
the Society advised that placing children out with local foster parents also avoided separating father and children, and ensured that the father would have ‘frequent opportunities of seeing them and retaining their affection’.\(^{167}\) That the Society urged fathers to maintain contact in order to preserve children’s affection drew on familiar stereotypes of their role within the family. Julie-Marie Strange demonstrates that contemporaries and historians alike, have often presented working-class fathers as absent, feckless or invisible in the family story, but argues that these stereotypes rarely represented the family experience of most working-class children.\(^{168}\)

Institutional contracts largely aimed to transfer authority over children to the Society whilst restricting the rights of relatives. Yet, unlike some welfare institutions that sought to sever children’s relationships with relatives, the WSS still expected relations to retain some responsibility for the children they admitted. This responsibility to care for children was entrenched in the requirement for payment: a maximum amount of five shillings a week for relatives who possessed the capacity to earn an income.\(^{169}\) Payment, the Society stated, served not as a means to obtain funds for their work, but as ‘a recognition on the part of the relatives of their responsibility’.\(^{170}\) Therefore, payment was invested with extra-economic meaning, functioning as a material symbol of parents’ commitment to their children. Moreover, despite restricted access to and contact with children, regular contributions had the potential to ensure that a


\(^{169}\) A number of questions pertain to payment on the application form. First, questions 9 and 10 require information regarding parents’ occupations and weekly earnings. Question 12 requires information regarding extended family members’ earnings. Question 15 and 16 ask the referrer to assess whether any relatives are able to maintain the child or contribute to its support, and whether any payment can be guaranteed exclusive of relatives. There are also inconsistencies in the set payment established, see footnote 38.

connection survived between relatives and inmates. Payment also provided a basis by which relatives could negotiate their rights over children and granted them some inclusion in the provision of childcare. For many relatives, however, five shillings was an unaffordable amount of money to pay, and case files indicate that the Society accepted many children without payment. In other cases, relatives paid nominal amounts towards children’s care. Meanwhile, other relatives agreed to pay, but subsequently lowered or even ceased payments, citing financial hardship, once children were admitted to the homes.

Although the contracts the WSS used to rescue, remove and assume responsibility for children for set periods of time functioned as formal agreements between the parties concerned, it was not until 1926 that legal adoption processes were introduced in England. Thus, WSS contracts held little legal authority. Instead, they were only effective in purpose and meaning with relatives’ consent and continued agreement with the terms imposed by the Society. This is not to say, however, that adoption processes were not recognised in broader society but rather, as Claudia Nelson has highlighted, adoption processes before 1926 were usually private and informal matters that did not involve the courts.

Prior to the passing of this legislation, a number of charitable organisations helped to facilitate these adoptions, including Barnardo’s and the WSS. Adoption also included the act of passing a child to family connections, kin and neighbours, particularly when orphaned. Since adoptions were neither registered nor did the process involve any aspect of the legal system, guardians possessed little rights over the adopted child who likewise, did not hold the same rights as natural children. Similarly, although WSS contracts were presented as and in some cases understood as binding agreements, the terms that were agreed to upon children’s admission could quickly and easily be disregarded by the WSS, biological relatives and children, as and when desired.

Children’s admission to the Society signalled their initiation into the institutional family. The permission for some relatives to access children through correspondence and visitation in all probability complicated the Society’s ideal model of institutional childhood and family, which the next chapter interrogates in more detail. Children’s contact with family members served as constant reminders of the superficial nature of the ideal family model the WSS sought to create in their homes. Yet, letters from some former inmates suggest that a culture of concealment about biological relatives and children’s identity was enacted within the homes. When children were parted from relatives at a very young age, correspondence from former inmates reveals that institutional staff in all probability disclosed little information to children regarding the circumstances of their admission and the identity of their relatives, even later on in life. A number of letters survive in case files written by former inmates back to the Society to enquire about any information regarding the identity of their relatives and the circumstances of their admission.175

Francis L who was admitted to the Society when he was 5 years old in 1914, wrote back to his old master and then to the Society’s Head Office in 1938 to ask for any information about ‘how he came to be put in the Waifs and Strays’ Society’. He stated that he had ‘been told little stories here and there about my past life, but there has never been any mention of relatives’ and asked ‘surely there are some relations somewhere?’ He further stated that he was in contact with a foster mother, Mrs. Barnett, who had cared for him prior to his admission to the Society, who was the ‘only person [who] has ever shown any kindness towards me apart from the Society’.176 The Society responded to his request informing him that they had lost sight of his mother 3 years after his admission, but informed him that he had an aunt called Lily.177 A later letter suggests that he had had no luck in trying to find his aunt, and a receipt indicates he donated a sum of one pound to the Society.178

As Cohen argues, it was in the best interests of those who adopted children – especially illegitimate children – to keep the true nature of children’s

175 This will be pursued further in chapter five of the thesis.
176 Case file 18349, Letter from Francis L to WSS, 11/2/1938.
177 Case file 18349, Letter from WSS to Francis L, 22/2/1938.
178 Case file 18349, Letter and notice of receipt from WSS to Francis L, September 1962.
circumstances a secret. It appears that this was also the consensus among WSS staff, whose model of institutional family and children’s reformation might be put at risk by children’s knowledge of their apparently undesirable connections and inadequate past lives. It is hard to determine how far children were complicit agents in the construction of the ideal institutional family, and how far reminders of biological relatives resulted in children’s resistance to the model. No evidence survives in the archive that hints at how children, who were ignorant of their biological families responded to other inmates’ relatives visiting them at the homes. For some, this most likely elicited feelings of jealousy, as well as longing, abandonment and worthlessness when children appeared to have no-one that ‘loved’ them. Relatives’ visitation might have functioned as a testament of love and value between co-residents within the homes. No evidence survives either to suggest that children, curious about the identity or circumstances of relatives, pestered matrons and masters for snippets of information whilst they were in the homes.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the significance of the concept of family in WSS childcare ideology. The Society’s fundraising literature, mission statements and staff guides demonstrate that the conceptualisation of family centred on a number of elements that extended beyond providing basic material needs for inmates. Permanency and physical existence within the institution went some way to cultivating a sense of unity and belonging for inmates, whilst literature indicates that the interpersonal relationships built between institutional co-residents could enhance inmates’ sense of family within the institution.

The chapter has also highlighted how application forms and other policies enabled the Society’s judicious selection of deserving cases and the terms that allowed children’s absolute adoption into the institutional family. Staff guidelines, suggest the Society’s anxiety about admitting only the cases that were considered the most deserving and in need of support. The chapter has also highlighted that such prudence in assessing cases, however, could result in the exclusion of those most in need of help, such as widows. The chapter has also

demonstrated how contracts sought to diminish parental rights over children in order to strengthen the model of ideal institutional family. As such, contracts tended to displace the significance of biological bonds in inmates’ lives in favour for the construction of a new model of institutional family that sought to provide an ideal home and family life for children’s moral reformation. Yet, whilst contracts sought to erase reminders of children’s family and their involvement in inmates’ lives, the chapter also suggests that practices that allowed relatives’ contact with children complicated the model of institutional family which will be interrogated further in the following chapter.

The notion of family is pursued in the next chapter. Although WSS contracts appeared to restrict the rights and authority of biological relatives, in practice, the relationship between the Society and biological relatives was much more complex and negotiable. The chapter highlights how the Society’s overall reluctance to sever relationships between inmates and relatives proved problematic to manage. The chapter unpicks the tensions raised in the Society’s model of family that allowed relatives to retain some access, contact and rights over children, and highlights the conflict and cooperation of poor families with the Society and their ideologies in the delivery of childcare.
CHAPTER TWO

Tensions in authority

Biological relatives’ negotiations over WSS practices

The terms ‘waifs’ and ‘strays’ that formed the name of the charity, implied that inmates had no one to care for them. Although not classed as ‘orphans’ by the WSS, these emotive terms used in public fundraising material evoked an image of the helpless, neglected child, abandoned by family members and friends tasked with their care. These waifs and strays were presented as essentially friendless and lost. Institutional representations of welfare-recipient children as orphans were commonplace and have been well debated by historians.180

Scholars’ evaluation of children’s family backgrounds suggests that inmates’ circumstances were often wholly different to these institutional representations. Notably, Murdoch’s research on Barnardo’s draws attention to the striking disjunction between institutional depictions of children as orphans and the realities of their family backgrounds.181 In many cases, economic instability drove parents to apply for children’s temporary admission to care and relatives who did survive, often continued to feel responsible for children, materially, emotionally and financially.182 This type of makeshift provision for children during periods of familial hardship formed a mixed economy of welfare during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.183 But within the context of welfare provision, many children’s institutions believed that biological family needed to be erased from the lives of inmates in order to effect their

181 Murdoch, Imagined Orphans, pp. 12–43.
182 Ibid., pp. 69–70.
transformation into productive, moral citizens.\textsuperscript{184} The Foundling Hospital’s policies, for example, restricted parents from maintaining relationships with children through letters, but did allow parents to enquire about children’s wellbeing with the institution directly, up to three times a year.\textsuperscript{185}

Despite the survival of inmates’ biological relatives, their role and agency within the provision of children’s institutional care has been little discussed by historians. Scholarship on institutional care for adult inmates, however, has begun to explore residents’ interactions with family and friends beyond the institution.\textsuperscript{186} Other works have made important contributions in presenting welfare dependent families as active agents whose decisions were not limited by dominant political, social and cultural forces.\textsuperscript{187} Using sources such as personal letters between welfare dependant families and institutions, these works offer valuable insight into the ways in which the poor negotiated with authorities to meet their own ends.

Yet beyond the process of admission, inmates’ relatives have often been treated as a fleeting presence in children’s lives whilst in institutional care. Recent research, however, has begun to explore the ways in which parents struggled to remain involved in children’s lives and influence the decisions made

\textsuperscript{184} Murdoch, \textit{Imagined Orphans}, pp. 12–43.


about their care despite policies that sought to sever familial ties and authority.\textsuperscript{188} By examining correspondence and petitions, other works have highlighted just how savvy welfare recipients were in their endeavours to obtain effective and meaningful assistance.\textsuperscript{189}

Nevertheless, the extent to which relatives accepted institutional limitations regarding contact and access to children remains a subject that requires further research. In particular, the enduring role of family members in institutional life and their attempts to maintain relationships with their children has not been sufficiently addressed. As the previous chapter highlighted, draconian institutional contracts were used to undermine the role of biological relatives and allowed the institution to assume authority over inmates. Similarly, depictions of relatives as problematic, immoral and feckless alongside representations of the adoption of ‘waifs’ and ‘strays’ into the idealised institutional family, further reinforced the absolute power of the institution.

Yet correspondence highlights that many relatives perpetually negotiated their authority with the welfare institution whilst children were in care. The following analysis of institutional correspondence shows that the WSS did not adopt a blanket severance of familial ties. Instead, correspondence demonstrates that their relationships and negotiations with relatives was much more complicated than histories of other welfare institutions suggest. In many cases, relatives’ demands and appeals over their rights were assessed individually, with some flexibility applied for certain cases.

This nuance and complexity in institutional practices has been acknowledged by Crowther in her critique of the workhouse. Crowther argues that although nineteenth-century workhouses have often been understood as total institutions, in reality, seemingly rigid and inflexible policies, which were often determined centrally, were enacted with variation. Their application differed wildly according to interpretation, the personalities of those in positions of


authority, as well as specific economic, regional and social contexts. Like Crowther’s reading of institutional policy and practice, this chapter demonstrates that this was also the case for the WSS, especially with regard to their relationships with children’s relatives.

Family, in its biological sense therefore, is at the heart of this chapter. By examining a range of correspondence, the chapter highlights relatives’ perceptions of their rights and entitlements in the provision of welfare. The chapter also evaluates the agency of poor families in their attempts to oversee childcare and preserve relationships with children in care. This analysis advances understandings of welfare-recipient families beyond the institutional space, their responses to welfare provision processes and how institutional officials imagined poor families. Moreover, letters between the institution, inmates and welfare-recipient families are valuable sources that provide new dimensions and narratives of experiences of poverty, parenthood, family rights, love, care and concern of children.

The chapter first analyses the points of tension that institutional policies created between relatives and the Society, and relatives’ responses to the limitations imposed upon their involvement in children’s lives. Relatives’ concordance, conflicts and negotiations with the institution in their attempts to procure assistance on their own terms will therefore become the focal point of the chapter. The ways in which relatives challenged contractual agreements in order to remain active figures in children’s lives are also addressed.

Secondly, the chapter examines how far the Society adapted their policies in order to respond to and meet relatives’ demands or resolve conflicts. These negotiations and compromises are important in demonstrating that boundaries of structural power often fluctuated. Moreover, willingness to accommodate or demonstrate sensitivity to familial demands and preferences, confirms that the preservation of relationships with biological relatives was an aspect that was not as neglected by children’s welfare agencies as historians have frequently posited. Indeed, the ways in which the Society could respond flexibly and

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sensitively to relatives’ requests suggests that the Victorian children’s institution was not as heartless and cruel as once imagined.

**Points of tension in childcare provision**

Chapter one has drawn attention to the Society’s belief in the importance of the family model in children’s care and development, and the ways in which they attempted to create a sense of family within the institution. In particular, the chapter highlighted how the idea of family underpinned childcare ideology, and how contracts allowed the institution to assume familial authority over children placed in their care. The WSS expected that relatives would relinquish many of their rights, authority and responsibility over the inmates in their care.

Since voluntary childcare institutions generally operated beyond the remit of state governance, few standardised regulations existed regarding parental access to children. Whilst the Charity Organisation Society (COS) aimed to inspect institutions and issue reports on them, it could not compel institutions to implement their operational recommendations. In many cases, institutional authorities sought to limit relatives’ contact with the children they placed in care. Jessica Sheetz–Nguyen highlights how The Foundling Hospital restricted mothers from writing to their children or visiting them. Mothers were only permitted to write directly to the Board of Governors to enquire about the welfare of their child. Murdoch draws attention to the inflexible and inconvenient processes by which relatives could visit and correspond with children under Barnardo’s care. As such, parents struggled to remain involved in children’s lives and often had to resort to obtaining assistance from local police and the press in order to challenge institutional policies that sought to sever their ties with children. Similarly, Lynn Abrams highlights that strenuous efforts were made to prevent contact between parents and children in Quarrier’s homes. Although parents often wrote to their children, expressing both their affection

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and concern for them, institutions frequently did not inform inmates of their parent’s attempts to contact them.\textsuperscript{195}

Yet unlike other children’s institutions, the WSS did not adopt a hard-line policy of severing contact between inmates and their relatives. Although the institution was not overly generous in their policies regarding familial contact, relatives were allowed to correspond with inmates, to send them gifts, enquire about their wellbeing with matrons, masters and other WSS staff, and to visit them monthly on set visiting days. Some case files demonstrate that a degree of flexibility was given to relatives to make alternative arrangements for contact and visitation if this was deemed necessary.\textsuperscript{196}

In spite of the WSS’s flexibility and relatives’ agreement to institutional terms upon admission, many relatives challenged set policies and regulations following children’s admission to care. Several facets of care became regular sources of tension, conflict, grievance and negotiation between relatives, inmates and the institution. These tensions usually coalesced around relatives’ varied perceptions regarding their rights over children, and their expectations regarding the terms of access to and influence over children in care. Children’s relatives and the institution continually battled over power and authority over inmates’ care.

The first tension in the Society’s policies was the placement of children. Application forms notified relatives that children might be placed in any of the Society’s homes upon admission. With over 108 homes located across the country by 1908 (see appendix 2), placement depended on available space and often resulted in children’s relocation at considerable distances from their families. Distance not only made it harder for relatives to maintain relationships with children but it also devalued family members’ authority. Eager to maintain power over and relationships with children, relatives commonly used application forms as well as accompanying referral letters as a means to negotiate the distance at which they were placed. Parents’ appeals requested that children be

\textsuperscript{195} Abrams, \textit{The Orphan Country}, pp. 107, 164.
\textsuperscript{196} For examples of special visiting arrangements, see case files: 9433, 15240, 11030, 15032. Case file 18355 also confirms that the Society made an exception to their usual rule that prohibited children visiting their relatives. The girl was allowed to spend Christmas visiting her married aunt and arranged an escort for her.
placed in WSS homes close to their relatives so that they might see inmates more easily on set visiting days.197

Support from respected and influential clergy figures in referral forms helped lend credence and impact to relatives’ petitions. The curate of a vicarage near Folkestone who referred Samuel F for admission stated that it would be a great favour to the family if he could be placed in the nearby Dover Home.198 The Society endeavoured to do so by liaising with the master of the Dover Home, but lack of space resulted in his placement in a home in Cheshire. It is probable that relatives felt they could keep watch over their children if they were in nearby homes. Proximity of children to relatives also provided some reassurance that the family circle was not irreparably broken.199

Unlike some children’s institutions such as The Foundling Hospital, WSS policies did allow relatives to visit on certain days and to correspond with children placed in care.200 The decision to allow family members to remain in children’s lives may be explained by the Society’s acknowledgement of the affection that existed between inmates and family, as the previous chapter demonstrated. Moreover, the ability for relatives to remain in contact with children, in tandem with the requirement for payment, further ensured that relatives were not absolved of their obligations to children.

However, children’s placement in homes across the country also enabled the institution to hinder relatives’ access to children. Supposedly scientific assessments of relatives’ character and respectability carried out by WSS officials and affiliated figures through casework, investigation and visitation, could be particularly detrimental to familial relationships with children in care.201

Referral letters that accompanied application forms, written by a range of

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197 Relatives attempts to influence where children were homes exist in the following case files: 9400, 15019, 10970, 15051, 15295.
198 Case file 10757, Referral letter from curate, January 1905.
199 A number of studies suggest there were affective relationships in the working-class family and that there were complex relationships between children and parents. See Ross, Love and Toil, pp. 128–166; Strange, Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, pp. 230–263; Strange, ‘Fatherhood, providing, and attachment in late Victorian and Edwardian working-class families’, pp. 1007–1027; Strange, ‘Fatherhood, furniture and the inter-personal dynamics of working-class homes’ pp. 271–286; Bailey, Parenting in England.
201 For discussions of the science of charitable provision, see in particular, Himmelfarb, Poverty and Compassion, pp. 185–207.
esteemed community and clergy figures, provided subjective images of applicants that tended to focus on relatives’ perceived immorality or respectability, their capacity and intention for industriousness, and their apparent ‘deservingness’ of assistance.

Although valuable sources that provide a glimpse into how dependants were perceived, these letters are limited by their subjectivity and often-narrow scope of measuring the need for help. Ruth Livesey’s research on COS’s female social investigators draws similar conclusions about the role of these individuals. She argues that investigators employed specific narrative strategies that centred on reading the ‘character’ of the poor through detailed descriptions of their domestic environments and physical appearance. The representations of poverty constructed by these investigators were, at times, incongruous with the ways in which the poor themselves understood and voiced their circumstances.202

Thus, when relatives were perceived to be immoral or might endanger the child’s wellbeing, on occasion, the Society relocated children at some distance from relatives.203 At times, the institution refused to provide relatives with information regarding children’s location. The Society thought it in the best interests of Johanna M to withhold knowledge of her whereabouts from her mother: an alleged prostitute described as a ‘very unsatisfactory character’, who had taken her 9-year-old daughter out with her whilst she solicited trade.204 Records suggest that the mother did not write to the Society directly to ascertain Johanna’s location. Instead, Johanna’s mother approached Governor Phillips, the Children’s Aid Society Officer who had referred Johanna for admission, for her whereabouts. Phillips highlighted his anxiety over Johanna’s potential exploitation, warning the institution that Johanna’s mother would ‘do her best to regain the child when she is placed in service’. Consequently, Rudolf reminded

203 Several case files suggest that children were deliberately placed in or transferred to homes at a considerable distance from ‘troublesome’ relatives. See case files: 15051, 15326, 9678, 15009, 15323, 9639, 15308.
204 Case file 9648, see application form and referral letter from Governor Philips, Children’s Rescue Officer, Children’s Aid Society, 30/5/1903 and letter from Rudolf to Miss Walters, Cold Ash Home, 15/4/1908.
the matron not to divulge this information to the mother should she get in touch with her directly.205

This reminder highlights the preventive strategies the WSS adopted to ensure that they retained authority over the child. No records survive to suggest how her mother responded to her loss of rights over her daughter. Meanwhile, a letter from Johanna’s matron to Rudolf claimed that Johanna had little interest in pursuing a relationship with her mother or any friends she knew before her admission, although there is no documentation written by the child to support this claim.206

Other appeals regarding children’s placement were more rudimentary. The father of one boy agreed to his placement in any home, as long as the family knew where he was, so as not to lose sight of him.207 Although the referral letter suggested that the mother had neglected the infant – having been burnt – the Society did not consider the family so disreputable as to withhold his whereabouts from them.208 While the case was treated as one of ‘neglect’, permission for the parents to keep in touch signalled the Society’s recognition that accidents did happen and that it was not always the fault of ‘feckless’ parenting. Samuel’s parents were allowed to write to him, although the case file indicates this occurred intermittently.209 Relatives also appealed for siblings not to be separated when placed in care. Mrs. Wilson, writing on behalf of Lily A’s mother, stated she was ‘anxious that she should join her sister Mabel at St. Lawrence’s Home at Exeter’.210

Another mother repeatedly requested that her youngest son be transferred from the Bournemouth Home to the Pimlico Home where his brother was placed. Her letters confirmed that she would find it easier to visit both boys at Pimlico,

205 Case file 9648, letter from Rudolf to Miss Walters, 15/4/1908.
206 Case file 9648, letter from Miss Walters to Rudolf, 11/1/1910.
207 Case file 9407, application form, January 1903.
208 Burning was a major issue at the time, which was reflected in campaigns to change legislation to ensure that parents must have fireguards in their homes. This was enacted in the Children’s Act of 1908, and consequently, parents who did not have fireguards were seen as neglectful. See Vicky Holmes, ‘Absent Fireguards and Burnt Children: Coroners and the Development of Clause 15 of the Children’s Act 1908’, Law, Crime and History, 2 (2012), pp. 21–58.
209 Case file 9407, letter from Islington School, 7/9/1905.
210 Case file 9445, referral letter from Mrs MJ Wilson, January 1903.
given its proximity to her own home. The Society arranged the boy’s transferral the following year after space became available at the home.

The issue of children’s emigration to Canada became a point of much tension and negotiation. Following the Poor Law Board’s approval of child emigration as a means to relieve welfare demand, by the later decades of the century, a number of organisations had adopted emigration as a means of disposing of children and reducing expenditure associated with maintaining pauper children. Canada became a popular emigration destination for Evangelical reformers who, as Joy Parr argues, endorsed the supposed moral and physical advantages of starting a new life in a rural environment. Moreover, in support of these schemes, the Canadian government provided a range of subsidies and grants to enable children’s exportation.

Like other child rescue organisations, the WSS presented emigration as a means of having a ‘fair chance’ in the new world away from the moral contagion associated with children’s familial environments. Boarded out in ‘moral and pious rural homes’, reformers promoted the benefits of industrious training that helped children become independent individuals. Within the institution, emigration was presented to children as a path restricted to a fortunate and select few, which could foster a sense of competition and desire within the homes. Similarly, Abrams and Parr argue that reformers promoted emigration as a journey of adventure and excitement with distant countries such as Canada, highly idealised as a ‘promised land’ for work, education, moral and spiritual virtue.

In reality, children’s experiences rarely lived up to expectations that the Empire was a land of opportunity. As Thomas Jordan highlights, children found themselves in varying situations from loving farm families to situations of

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211 Case files 9399 and 9400, see letters from Maria H to Rudolf: 20/4/1906; 4/6/1906; 6/6/1906; Nov 1906; and, 8/1/1907.


213 Parr, Labouring Children, p. 31.


brutal exploitation, abuse and neglect.\textsuperscript{218} Abrams suggests that approximately two thirds of children who emigrated from Quarrier’s Homes were ‘exploited, neglected, defrauded or mistreated’ and many experienced isolation and loneliness.\textsuperscript{219} Lack of adequate aftercare and contact with relatives whilst overseas, in many cases, compounded children’s sense of abandonment, neglect, loneliness and rejection.\textsuperscript{220}

As other historians have argued, the most contentious aspect of emigration was the subject of parental knowledge and consent. Parr’s research on philanthropic emigration schemes highlights that relatives often had no power over whether their children were sent overseas. Consent to children’s emigration was considered implicit for parents who applied to Barnardo’s.\textsuperscript{221} The Quarrier, Macpherson and Birt homes similarly made emigration a precondition of admission, which meant that institutions were responsible for making decisions regarding children’s ‘ultimate disposal’ instead of relatives.\textsuperscript{222} Parr estimates that in total, between 1882 and 1908, 23\% of children who emigrated to Canada did so without the consent of their relatives, or with the consent of the Home Secretary instead of familial consent.\textsuperscript{223}

Scholarship has also demonstrated that Barnardo implemented a selective notification policy for relatives of emigrating children. Some relatives were notified of children’s emigration in advance and invited to visit in order to bid their farewells. Other relatives, however, never received notification that their children were to emigrate whilst others were notified following children’s transportation. Parr calculates that 42\% of relatives of all girls emigrating from Barnardo’s homes received notification after they had sailed for Canada.\textsuperscript{224} Meanwhile, Abrams argues that by contrast, William Quarrier obtained relatives’ permission for emigration and informed them of the impending journey.\textsuperscript{225}

\textsuperscript{219} Abrams, \textit{The Orphan Country}, pp. 144–145.
\textsuperscript{220} Ibid., pp. 89–91. See also Rooke and Schnell, ‘The “King’s Children” in English Canada’, pp. 387–420.
\textsuperscript{221} Parr, \textit{Labouring Children}, pp. 68–69.
\textsuperscript{222} Ibid., p. 71 and Abrams, \textit{The Orphan Country}, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{223} Parr, \textit{Labouring Children}, p. 67.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., p. 71.
\textsuperscript{225} Abrams, \textit{The Orphan Country}, p. 139.
Like Quarrier’s emigration policies, the WSS required relatives to express their objection or consent to emigration on application forms. The application form, however, stated that preference for admission was given to cases with consent. This clause would have had great impact on relatives’ decisions, and in all likelihood, desperate and destitute applicants were cajoled into consenting in order to increase the chance of admission. Nevertheless, numerous relatives objected to emigration even when familial survival depended on children’s admission. In the majority of cases, relatives’ wishes regarding emigration were taken into account by the institution. Cases where relatives’ objections to emigration went unheeded by the Society are much less common in WSS records than historians suggest was the case in Barnardo’s.

The ways in which consent and objection was expressed by families demonstrates their attempts to challenge WSS authority. Since consent to emigration was a complex and contentious issue, many relatives chose not to answer the question on application forms. By avoiding expressing any preference whatsoever, relatives hoped that their application for admission might be looked on favourably and only once the child was admitted would they object to emigration. Maggie C’s mother made no answer to the question of emigration. A newspaper clipping contained in the case file records that Maggie’s mother and stepfather had repeatedly abused her: beating her with a stick, forcing her to walk 4 hours in the snow, throwing her in a brook, blackening her eye, and giving her ‘a thrashing’. She was also insufficiently nourished. The mother was sentenced for 8 days imprisonment and the stepfather for 14 days.

Seven years after admission, letters from Maggie’s matron to Rudolf claim that Maggie, then aged 14, wished to emigrate. Despite having been convicted of abuse, the WSS sought the mother’s consent. She strongly objected

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226 See question 27 on application forms produced during and after 1887. This clause only appears in applications forms from c. 1887 onwards. In earlier application form, consent to emigration was not a question that appeared on the application form, and between 1886 and 1887, questions regarding placement anywhere in the UK and abroad formed a single question. Post–1887, emigration questions became separate to that pertaining to consent to UK placement. The change in phrasing and format of the question may be in part due to a greater number of children emigrating by 1887 and the greater experience gained by the WSS in doing so.

227 Parr, Labouring Children, pp. 62–82; see especially, p. 67.

228 See application forms in case files: 9380; 9385; 9390; 9396; 9399; and, 9444.

229 Case file 9452, newspaper clipping, unknown source and date.
to Maggie’s emigration and threatened that ‘if anything happens you are responsible’. However, at the time of conviction the courts had transferred guardianship rights over Maggie to a family friend Miss. Dogen. Apparently eager to emigrate Maggie, the Society persuaded Miss. Dogen to consent and she emigrated in 1911.

The language used to express objection provides insight into how relatives strategically resisted the Society’s practices. Whilst most answers on applications forms simply stated ‘yes’ or ‘no’, others provided detailed and exaggerated explanations in order to convey relatives’ desperation for children to stay in the country. One boy’s grandmother stated that she hoped he would not emigrate since she was ‘quite alone in the world’. The referral letter reiterated her plea but also highlighted her exaggeration: the boy was not her sole relation as he also had a sister who was entering service at the time of his admission. Other remarks conveyed the strength of feeling about emigration, with relatives stating they ‘thoroughly’ or ‘strongly’ objected to emigration.

The institution frequently sought assistance from referrers and members of the local community known to families in efforts to persuade them to consent to emigration. This strategy was usually adopted when relatives rescinded their initial consent at the time of application, many having felt the hardship of being separated from their children, as well as changes in social, economic and material circumstances. Indeed, with the loss of other family members, relatives might find themselves reliant on a smaller family circle during times of adversity, vulnerability, illness and old-age.

Furthermore, children’s prolonged separation from relatives and the comparative difficulty in maintaining familial bonds might cause relatives to become fully cognisant of their loss. Abrams points to the struggles encountered by parents trying to remain in touch with children placed in Quarrier’s homes. Contacts and visits with children, she states, were usually discouraged and when children emigrated, news from the colonies could be intermittent and censored.

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231 Case file 9452, letter from Rudolf to unknown recipient, 21/4/1911.
232 Case file 10671, application form, 9/1/1905.
233 Case file 10671, referral letter from Priest-in-charge, St. Martin’s Mission, 9/1/1905.
234 See Case file 10683, application form, 7/1/1905.
For some relatives, therefore, comprehension of ‘losing’ children altogether through emigration was only fully realised after placing children in care. This realisation was further compounded by the great distances some relatives had to travel in order to visit children.

Referrer Rev Richard Arkwright was instrumental in securing Elizabeth W’s admission while her father was in prison. Arkwright also obtained the father’s consent to transfer custody of the girl to the Society, as well as his initial consent to emigration. A week after Elizabeth’s admission, however, the father wrote to Arkwright to rescind his consent. Arkwright approached the Society for advice, who instructed him to be ‘inclined to ignore the objections which he now raises’ and to remind him that Elizabeth was accepted on condition of his consent. The Society also urged Arkwright to make clear to the father the advantages of emigration. Arkwright persuaded Elizabeth’s father to bid consent to her emigration, which occurred in July 1904. It is probable, however, that his consent was made under duress having been cajoled into agreement, and that he was not an equal participant in the decision making regarding his child’s care.

That the Society bestowed referrers with the authority to influence relatives’ decisions about the care children received, complicates the power dynamic within the charitable contract. Furthermore, that referrers and other intermediaries loosely affiliated with both biological family and the WSS could shape the fate of inmates also underscores the extent to which relatives relinquished their power over their children. The case of Emily R and Ellen R highlights the complex role referrers assumed and calls into question the extent to which relatives really understood the terms to which they agreed. The girls’ mother, Esther, objected to their emigration and had stated so on the application form. Referrer Alice Willis, the 28-year-old wife of the Curate of Horsham,

236 Case file 9440, application form and referral letter, January 1903.
237 Case file 9440, letter from Rudolf to R. Arkwright, 20/2/1903. For the perceived advantages of emigration, see Abrams, The Orphan Country, pp. 122–161; Parr, Labouring Children, pp. 45–62.
238 Case file 9440, emigration consent, February 1903 and case note regarding emigration, 28/7/1904.
239 England and Wales Census, 1881, FamilySearch (https://familysearch.org, accessed 13th September 2012), Alice Emily Willis in household of Edmund Willis, Horsham,
persuaded Esther to consent a week after their admission, although an additional handwritten note by Willis stated that Esther hoped they would be ‘obedient and good children so as that they may be able to stay in England’. This statement highlighted Esther’s reluctance in giving her consent, and her hope that the Society would acknowledge this.

Her hopefulness that her children might be ‘obedient and good’ also draws attention to the association between emigration and criminal transportation: a practice that had ceased only recently in 1868. Esther’s plea implies her belief that emigration was reserved for penalising children who displayed incorrect behaviour in the homes, whilst those considered ‘good’ or morally upright might avoid the punitive ‘sentence’ of emigration.

Following the deterioration of Esther and Willis’s relationship, Esther wrote to Rudolf regarding her children’s care, stating:

I have found out today that they are in a training home for Canada. Of course I very much object to this sort of thing. You know that I signed against it – at least I signed a paper to say that I did not wish them to leave England...I really cannot let my children go out of England. I shall be very glad if you will let me know that they will not be sent away.

Esther’s letter served as an attempt to rescind the reluctant consent she gave only three months earlier. It is possible that no longer feeling beholden to Willis, Esther was able to express her genuine feelings regarding the plans for her children’s care. Conversely, her adamant tone claiming that she had already expressed her objection might highlight the misunderstanding or miscommunication regarding her consent.

As many relatives relied solely on the information and advice given by referrers who completed applications on their behalf, it is possible that Willis provided vague or inadequate information to Esther regarding the forms she signed. Esther’s apparent misunderstanding of her rights may also be explained by the possibility of Willis’ misrepresentation of information in order to mislead


240 Case file 9433 and 9434, emigration consent forms, 22/1/1903.

Esther into consenting to emigration. Indeed, Willis’ referral letter highlights her determination to get the girls away from ‘bad surroundings’.242 She further stated that Esther’s care had ‘not been altogether satisfactory’ and that she ‘could have done better if she tried’.243

The Society was unwilling to accommodate Esther’s change in opinion. The institution wrote to state that the girls had only been accepted on the condition that they might be emigrated, and that should she desire to withdraw her consent, it was likely that other arrangements would need to be made for the girls.244 Esther’s response further highlights her misunderstanding and her lack of authority in the decisions regarding her daughters’ care. She argued that Willis had made ‘a great mistake’ in thinking that she had consented in the first place and that, despite Willis asking several questions for the application, she was resolute that consent to emigration remained unanswered. She instead stated that Willis had completed the forms of consent and that in doing so, she had not ‘acted quite so straightforward as she might have done’. She further argued that she was ignorant to the ‘Society’s intention of sending them away’ and that if their emigration was a condition of admission, Willis ‘ought to have told me’.245

Despite her attempts to negotiate, the Society asked Esther to make alternative arrangements for the girls.246 Esther communicated her unhappiness over her treatment and took effective action by removing the girls and placing them in an Orphan’s Home in nearby Hampton.247 Esther demonstrated her authority in removing her daughters from the Society’s care and opting to place them in an alternative home. It remains unclear why the Society capitulated to her actions, but it is likely that in her persistent refusal to conform to their expectations and terms of care, it was considered easier to relinquish the girls back to their mother.

Regardless of regulations that institutional contracts imposed on biological family members, many relatives retained clear ideas about their rights, which often differed distinctly to the rights the institution expected them to

242 Case files 9433 and 9434, referral letter from Alice Willis, January 1903.
243 Ibid.
244 Case files 9433 and 9434, letter from Rudolf to Esther R, 9/5/1903.
245 Case files 9433 and 9434, letter from Esther R to Rudolf, May 1903.
246 Case files 9433 and 9434, letter from Rudolf to Esther R, 9/5/1903.
247 Case files 9433 and 9434, letter from Esther R to Rudolf, May 1903.
relinquish. In the majority of cases, relatives appeared to understand institutional policies. Tensions that arose, therefore, were often associated with an unwillingness to accept institutional terms and loss of familial authority, as well as with attempts to negotiate special privileges. The case of Henry H below demonstrates relatives’ alacrity in voicing their concerns or their authority over children. Since many relatives appear to have been aware of the risks of permanent separation from children placed in care, even the idea of emigration elicited anxiety amongst some relatives.

Despite her objection on the institution’s application form, Maria H’s subsequent and repeated pleas with the Society not to emigrate her son suggests that she remained perpetually concerned her wishes might be ignored. Three years after Henry’s admission to the Talbot Boy’s Home, Bournemouth, Maria wrote again stating that it seemed all the boys in the home eventually emigrated and reminded Rudolf that this was against her consent. The case file does not indicate how Maria knew that boys emigrated from Talbot Home, but it is likely that Henry had communicated this to her in correspondence or on visiting days. Neither was Talbot Home an emigration home: children proposed for emigration were drawn from a range of WSS homes. Not all children were considered suitable for emigration due to physical or mental health issues and only a number of residents in any one home would therefore be assessed for emigration. Yet despite the Society’s continued reassurance that the boy would not emigrate unless she consented, Maria was compelled to write later in 1906 to reiterate her objection. Records indicate that Henry never emigrated under WSS care.

Children’s agency in the decisions made about their care also caused conflict between family members and the institution. In some cases, the emigration committee was compelled to assess children’s suitability for emigration after matrons and masters claimed that children had expressed a desire to emigrate. The authenticity of these claims, however, is difficult to establish. In other cases, family members only consented to emigration if the

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248 Case files 9399 and 9400, letter from Maria H to Rudolf, 20/4/1906.
249 Case file 9400, see correspondence between Maria H and Rudolf, 20/4/1906; 21/4/1906; 4/6/1906; and, 16/11/1906.
250 See case files: 9452 (letter from Mrs. Dogen to Rudolf, 23/4/1911); 9456 (report for Harry N at Standon Farm Home, 14/3/1906); 10693 (referral letter from Clerk to the
child desired to go when the time came. Neither did children always agree with the decisions their relatives made for them. Whilst relatives attempted to make informed decisions regarding the question of emigration, children could, at times, apply pressure to influence decisions, especially if they had been persuaded, misled or cajoled into believing the benefits of living and working abroad.

Children’s letters regarding the subject of emigration support these conclusions. Henry H expressed his discontent with his mother’s continued objection to emigration, and wrote numerous letters to persuade her as to the benefits of his living abroad. It is important to note, however, that it is possible that his proclaimed desire to go to Canada was not genuine, since children’s letter writing in the institution could be subject to editing, supervision and inspection by staff. Unsuccessful in changing his mother’s mind, Henry wrote a final time to blackmail his mother into giving her consent. He stated:

I want you to understand that it would be best for me to emigrate…if you don’t answer…they will send me home, whether you like it or not. Remember let me know before the week is out whether you will agree…I want you to grant my wish which is emigration to Canada so I can make good use of myself. It is the Society’s wish that I emigrate to Canada, as I won’t always have a mother and I want to strike out for myself and get on in the world.

His attempt to force her consent ultimately failed. Upset by the tone of Henry’s letters and anxious he should not emigrate, Maria requested he be transferred to a home closer to her in London. The Society accommodated her request, transferring him to the Pimlico Boy’s Home where his brother John also resided. Henry’s letter, however, highlights his attempts to shape his fate through the use of persuasive, authoritative and demanding tones. It indicates

Guardians, Union Workhouse, Chichester, 30/12/1904); 10760 (letter from Rose M to Miss Robinson, c.1912).
251 See application forms in case files: 9383; 9388; and 10672.
252 Case file 9400, letter from Henry H to his mother, 14/10/1906. This letter survives in the case file as Henry’s mother wrote to the Society upon receiving this letter to complain to them about his attitude and determination to emigrate against her wishes. She enclosed Henry’s letter with her own to the Society.
253 Case files 9399 and 9400, see letter from Rudolf to Mr Kirby, Pimlico House, c. December 1906.
254 Case file 9400, letter from Pimlico House Boy’s Brigade to confirm Henry H’s admission, 3/1/1907.
that children too, believed in their right and authority to determine their life-course.

**Contact with inmates**

Despite the Society’s mission to create a sense of institutional family within their residences, they claimed that the institutional family neither intended to break family ties nor ‘replace’ biological relatives as chapter one demonstrated.\(^{255}\)

Relatives’ ability to visit and correspond with inmates therefore, was crucial to maintaining their rights over children and inclusion in the decisions made about their care. Case files indicate, however, that some relatives were prohibited from keeping in contact with inmates if their presence or influence in children’s lives was considered dangerous. The assessment of family’s character and whether they could retain contact with children was often crude, basic and subject to the opinions of untrained referrers and other individuals loosely affiliated with the institution. This meant that any difference in opinion in how children should be cared for, or indeed, any narrow or prejudiced judgment on the moral fabric of the family could determine whether relatives were irreparably separated from inmates.

Relatives’ rights to correspond with or visit children, however, do not appear to have been frequently rescinded.\(^{256}\) WSS founder Rudolf, who was responsible for making such decisions, appeared to be reluctant to completely prohibit contact even when relatives’ contact with inmates was considered to be undesirable. Unsurprisingly, his decisions caused some tension amongst institutional staff members. One matron wrote to Rudolf to notify him that she had turned away the ‘rude’ and ‘immoral’ guardians of Isabella B, who were described as ‘dreadful women’ who seemed ‘bent on having her back’.\(^{257}\)

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\(^{256}\) Case file 11031, where relatives were discouraged from writing to child and case file 15009, where father was prohibited from visiting. In addition, discussions and correspondence with The Children’s Society archivists confirm that these restrictions were established only in exceptional cases. At other times, correspondence was sent via the Head Office so as to restrict relatives’ knowledge as to children’s physical location.

\(^{257}\) Case file 5, letter from Miss Rye to Rudolf, 10/3/1882.
advised her to allow them to visit Isabella, but the matron further informed him that she would not allow them in the home if they appeared to be immoral.258

In other cases, instead of restricting relatives’ rights to visit or correspond with children, the institution placed children as far out of reach of their relatives as possible in the hope that this might discourage contact. The Guardians of the Worksop Union in which one girl had been placed, deemed the parents of one girl to be particularly undesirable: her father was considered a bad influence having been imprisoned for an unrecorded offence.259 A letter from her matron highlighted that the girl was completely uneducated and described as ‘wild, uncouth, naughty and disobedient’ because of her parents’ perceived failings.260

Following the advice of the Guardians, the girl was placed roughly 125 miles away from her home in Worksop to the institutional home in Shipton-Under-Wychwood, in the hope that this would result in the deterioration of family ties. Whilst this was an extreme measure, rules regarding the admission of children to the institution meant children could be placed in homes anywhere across the country, as the previous chapter demonstrated.

Indeed, for many relatives the expense of travelling to see inmates and the need for relatives to take time off work often precluded their ability to visit frequently.261 One mother complained that the cost of a one-day ticket from her home in London to Bournemouth was a ‘great strain’ that prevented her from visiting more than once a year. There is no indication of the cost of her journey to visit her son, but she pleaded with the Society on numerous occasions to transfer her son to a home in London which was fulfilled a year later in 1908.262

Another mother expressed her distress ‘at the thought of the long distance and at her consequent inability to see her child’ who was due to be transferred from Knebworth to the more distant Dolgellau.263

Moreover, WSS visiting days, like Barnardo’s, were usually weekdays, which prevented many working relatives from visiting inmates.264 Although

258 Case file 5, copy of letter from Rudolf to Miss. Bryan, March 1882; letter from Miss Rye to Rudolf, April 1882.
259 HLR case file 9315, application form and letter from Worksop Union, 27/11/1902.
260 HLR case file 9315, letter from St Michael’s to Rudolf, 16/04/1905.
262 Case file 9400, see letters from Maria H to Rudolf, 20/4/1906 and 4/6/1906.
contact between relatives and children was not prohibited, even the most frequent correspondence and visits were unlikely to serve as meaningful substitutes for interpersonal familial relationships. Correspondence and infrequent opportunities to visit children would only have provided inmates with irregular contact and interactions with relatives. Moreover, inmates possessed little freedom to contact those they loved when they needed in times of loneliness or upset as well as beyond scheduled routines. As such, there were strict limits set by the institution regarding the extent to which biological relatives were really included or involved in children’s care, but this was often open to negotiation.

Whilst inmates’ were prohibited from returning to their relatives and family homes for holidays, beyond set visiting days for each home and monthly letter-writing routines, regulations regarding access and contact were little established. For children boarded out with foster carers, contact with relatives could be both more or less frequent. Correspondence suggests that the absence of regulations prompted diverse expectations of relatives’ rights to their children. The demands articulated by relatives were at times challenging for the Society to manage and compounded by the institution’s decision to assess each case individually.

Although a number of issues must be taken into account in the analysis of surviving correspondence in case files, examination of these letters allows us to draw a number of conclusions about relatives’ contact with children. First, even in cases where correspondence was permitted, children’s contact with family members was often sporadic. Letter writing for many relatives was difficult and time-consuming, whilst postage and sheets of paper could be expensive luxuries for those struggling economically. Literacy rates amongst relatives also determined the frequency of correspondence, especially if relatives depended on

265 A survey of surviving records held in the archive has produced no record of policies, rules or regulations pertaining to these elements of care. A letter from Rudolf to one mother regarding contact suggests that parents were allowed to write to children at any time, and that visiting was allowed ‘at all reasonable times’. (Case file 15051, letter from Rudolf to mother, 20/1/1910). Case file correspondence indicates that any requests for special privileges regarding access and contact were assessed on an individual basis according to circumstance. Similarly, letters suggest that these regulations were shaped by the individual personalities of staff members within the homes. Furthermore, my conclusions have been confirmed by archivists and records systems supervisor working at The Children’s Society.
other individuals for help in doing so. The master of the Islington Home observed that correspondence between Fred P and his parents was often irregular: in September 1907, ‘after a long time, this boy’s parents have again written to him’. For many other inmates, case files indicate that periods of months or years could pass before children received letters from family members.

Secondly, correspondence was also responsive: important events such as birthdays and Christmas usually prompted contact including the sending of cards and presents to inmates. The cost of Christmas cards and posting presents would have symbolised a special occasion for both the recipient and the sender. One case file contains a Christmas card with accompanying letter sent to M. from her brother in 1891 (figure 5). The card does not depict popular Christmas imagery although the printed message and biblical quotes reinforces its meaning. It is possible that the card was chosen for the image of a boy and a girl playing together to serve as a reminder of or desire for a sibling-type relationship.

Meanwhile, Thomas T wrote to his mother to let her know that several boys from his home were emigrating to Canada. Perhaps aware of her objection to his emigration, he wrote to alert her of the possibility of his own emigration. Concerned by his letter, his mother requested his removal. The case file provides no indication whether correspondence with his mother was regular, or limited to relating important but irregular news. Nevertheless, his letter suggests that inmates and relatives worked together to ensure that the preservation of familial bonds was not jeopardised by institutional decisions.

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266 Case file 9407, letter from Islington School to Rudolf, 7/9/1905.
267 See case files: 15004; 11026; 11070; 115058; and 15256.
268 HLR case file 2716, letter and Christmas card to M from her brother, 26/1/1891.
269 Although these symbols were recognisable images on Christmas cards, they were only produced on a small minority of cards. Neil Armstrong’s discussion on 19th century Christmas cards demonstrates that many omitted any spiritual dimension in design, and instead depicted topical, comic and secular designs. He argues that the content of many Christmas cards was unseasonal. See Neil Armstrong, Christmas in nineteenth-century England (Manchester 2010), pp. 31–38.
270 Case file 9455, letter from Elizabeth T to Miss Arthur, April 1905.
FIGURE 5. Christmas card to M from her brother, 26/1/1891.

Gifts sent to inmates were not infrequent: one mother sent a gift of a bible and her photograph to her daughter for her birthday,\textsuperscript{271} whilst another girls’ parents sent her 5 shillings for Christmas.\textsuperscript{272} Another girl, who was due to emigrate against her mother’s wishes, was sent a gift from her mother at Easter. Her mother had sent her daughter presents in the past, but the referrer was suspicious of her intentions and opened the package first. It is likely that packages to children, as well as letters, were inspected before being passed on to the recipient. Alongside the present, which remains unknown, the referrer found a letter from the mother pleading with her daughter to come home instead of going to Canada. The referrer actively withheld the mother’s letter from the girl.

\textsuperscript{271} Case file 7687, letter from Jane U to matron, Miss Stillwell, 19/4/1902.  
\textsuperscript{272} HLR case file 1106, letter from Barnes Ladies Association 31/3/1892.
and wrote to the Society to inform them of the letter and her actions. The referrer justified her actions by stating that the mother had broken her promise to her, and provided Maggie with her address in asking her to come home.  

It is impossible to know whether the Society would have taken a similar course of action, had the package arrived at the WSS home. Other case files suggest that decisions to withhold letters were not uncommon, and also imply the habitual inspection of communication and packages sent to inmates. Letters were usually withheld when the WSS believed correspondence would upset or unsettle inmates.  

It is also evident that inmates’ letters were inspected before being sent. One letter from A’s father complained that A’s letters were in pencil because the matron had refused to allow her to write to him. The complaint indicates that letter writing within the homes was supervised and that staff members had the power to deny inmates access to writing instruments such as ink and paper. The Honorary Secretary investigated the complaint and wrote to A’s father to notify him that all children were allowed to write to relatives once a month and that the matron, Mrs. Webb, had often provided stamps for A in the past when she had no money.  

Despite children’s ability to write to relatives, close supervision during the act of letter-writing allowed staff to censor and edit letters as they deemed appropriate.

Regardless of the reasons for writing, most letters reminded inmates of the love and loss that relatives felt for them. The emotions that permeated many of the letters written by relatives to inmates provides an alternative picture of the role that family played in the lives of institutional residents. Indeed, these letters are also crucial in negating the image of feckless, uncaring or abusive parents encountered in a range of nineteenth-century institutional literature for the public. Moreover, affirmation that poor parents did care about their children further contributes to a growing literature that offsets some historical accounts

273 Case file 9452, letter from Mrs. Dogen to Rudolf, 23/4/1911.  
274 See case file 9657, letters from mother and sister to Edith C, 27/5/1907; and case file 9664, letter from Miss F Smith to John Wilfred S, c. July 1907.  
275 HLR case file 175, letter from Miss. H to Rudolf, 22/7/1887.  
276 HLR case file 175, letter from Hon. Sec. to Rev. Horsley, 25/7/1887.  
277 See chapter 1. See also, Rose, ‘Raggedness and Respectability in Barnardo’s Archive’ pp. 136–150; Murdoch, Imagined Orphans, pp. 12–43; Koven, ‘Dr Barnardo’s “artistic fictions”’, pp. 6–45.
that argue the poor were emotionally blunted or contained and that they viewed children largely as economic burdens.278

A letter from a father to his son Tom P communicated his heartfelt devotion for him through written content and illustration (figure 6). The letter enquired whether Tom had received his gift of 2 dozen loaves and informed him of his parent’s intent to apply for his removal so that he might join his father, working as a sailor. The desire for Tom to work with his father suggests the strength and closeness of familial bonds. It also indicates the economic strategy where children helped to support the family by working alongside parents. However, the other contents of the letter suggests a more affective reading. The close of the letter further articulated their love for him and instructed him to keep alert, possibly to their future attempts to remove him from the institution:

…But you keep your eyes open and you might be surprised…Good Night Son and the Best of Luck from you[r] Loving Mother and Father and Buck up and don’t be down Hurted [Hearted] so Good Night Son From Mother And Father.279

The illustration depicting a lighthouse watching over the father’s ship also was likely to have been an analogy of the parents’ protective relationship with their son, and a symbol of their togetherness in imagination. The picture also pointedly illustrates their affection for him through the numerous kisses, the message ‘Good Luck Tom’ drawn in kisses, and the heart symbol. Overall, the time taken to draw the picture as well as the cost of the ink to do so were likely to have reinforced their message of devotion to the boy. The articulation of the parents’ emotions in this letter acknowledged not only their feelings regarding Tom’s absence but also demonstrated their attempts to maintain an intimate and personal relationship with him.

279 Case file 18381, letter from parents to Tom P, c. July/August 1916.
FIGURE 6. Letter from Parents to Tom P, c. 31/07/1918

Other relatives responded efficiently to threats or obstacles that prevented contact with inmates. In these cases, letters highlight relatives’ sense of power and their claims over children. One father’s letter to the Society complained that his daughter was entitled to write to him once a month. Having already negotiated with the foster mother, he approached the Society following the foster
mother’s response that she was too busy to attend to his daughter’s letter writing and that a letter once every three months should suffice. His letter to the institution argued that, since he only wrote once every two months, he ought to have a reply, stating: ‘it is the only comfort I have to hear from my children in my loneliness’. He further stated that his other two children in Barnardo’s homes ‘are always allowed to write monthly but it seems too much trouble for the woman who G. lives with’. He requested the Society to ‘please let the foster mother know that you arranged that G. should answer my letters’.  

The case file does not indicate whether his complaint prompted his daughter to write more frequently. What is evident, however, is that his claims of loneliness drew attention to feelings of entitlement to letters from his daughter, and perhaps even more so, given his claim of sending letters to her once every two months. His comparison of WSS practices to those of Barnardo’s can also be read as a further attempt to meet his own ends by provoking a sense of competition and promoting recognition of a fundamental standard between the policy and practices of the two institutions. Nevertheless, the complaint suggests that the WSS fell short in ensuring that their policies, practices and regulations regarding relatives’ contact with children were adhered to for those individuals boarded out beyond the institutional space. The complaint further suggests that relatives’ access to children very much depended on the individual personalities of staff members.

Other case files indicate that despite institutional letter-writing routines, some children chose not to correspond with relatives. In doing so, children exerted agency in choosing which individuals assumed roles as family members in their lives. Some letters between institutional staff indicate that children chose not to contact relatives or to reply to letters that they had received, although the validity of these claims is indeterminable. Meanwhile Percy B, having received letters after his father’s death from two different women both claiming to be his mother, was required to make a difficult decision in choosing whom to form a relationship with. Seeking the institution’s assistance, enquiries revealed that one

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280 HLR case file 4488, letter from G’s father, 30/10/1896.
281 See case files: 9648 (letter from Miss Walters to Rudolf, 11/1/1910); 10683 (letter from matron, St. Cuthbert’s Home to Rudolf, 21/7/1910); 10694 (letter from Rudolf to unknown recipient), 7/2/1918.
woman was his mother who had only recently discovered his whereabouts having been too fearful of approaching her violent husband in pervious years.282 The other woman was his stepmother by marriage, who wished him to return home to her, possibly in the hope of taking over the household or to work to support them.

Percy chose to ignore his stepmother’s requests and later letters in his case file highlight that he began to foster emotionally intimate and affectionate relationships with his biological mother and siblings:283

My darling son… Oh how I have long for this time dear, and prayed night in and night out for you…I went down on my knees this morning when I got your letter and to hear you call me your darling mother. My heart has longed for it dear and now I feel full up with joy now I have found you, and I hope dear, with God’s help, to see you very soon. I must make up to you, my darling boy, for what you have lost for all these years. I hope God will spare me a few years yet to you to get you to love me as I want you to. I have hungered for it for sixteen long years. I cannot hardly believe it yet, but I know dear, you are longing to see us too.284

Despite the long absence of contact with blood relatives in his life, the letters Percy M continued to receive from his mother and sister demonstrate a similar strength of affection for the boy. Letters such as the one above, also highlight the complex emotions relatives felt regarding placing children in care and finally being able to re-connect. This extract indicates the desperation and joy as well as feelings of guilt, shame and fear that children would not return their love that were entrenched in retrieving children from institutional care.

**Removing inmates from the institution**

The desire to remove children from the institution elicited the most negotiation from relatives. Like other welfare institutions, children were often deposited in WSS care by relatives who intended to reclaim them after a short period of time.285 Policies that attempted to sever familial ties, Murdoch argues, sought to

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282 Case file 18375, correspondence from mother and stepmother to Percy M, c. January–May 1919.
284 Case file 18375, Letter from mother to Percy M, 31/5/19.
285 Murdoch, Imagined Orphans, pp. 69–70.
reduce the number of children that were repeatedly admitted and removed from welfare institutions by relatives as circumstance dictated. WSS case files demonstrate that children’s removal was not usually prevented, although several obstacles could be put in place to discourage inmates’ return home. Relatives usually applied for inmates’ removal given a change in economic circumstances. Many children returned home after their relatives’ had gained new employment or greater financial security afforded by remarriage. Andrew K returned home three years after his admission following his mother’s remarriage and her subsequent ability to provide for him. John S, aged 14, was removed by his newly married brother after four years in institutional care. That his brother applied for his return demonstrates that it was not just parents that maintained ties with and responsibility for inmates.

Meanwhile, other relatives removed children when their separation became too much to bear. Lily A’s mother wrote to request her removal having recently received her other daughter Mabel home. She stated:

…I want you to let me have her home…I feel anxious to see her. Not seeing Mabel I felt it dreadfully and can’t seem to get over it…I have the promise of a nice little place for her…please let me know when I can have her I shall be pleased…

The urgency in the tone of the letter indicates the mother’s anxiety for her daughter to return home. Her assertion of loss and suffering caused by the absence of her children not only highlights her desire for Lily’s return home, but also reinforces her maternal sense of protection, yearning and nurture of her children. She further insisted that Lily would return home to a ‘nice little place’ and that she had found a job opening for her with a lady. Her claim of longing for her child as well as her recognition that Lily needed a stable home and employment probably functioned as an attempt to demonstrate that she was a

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287 Case file 9383, letter from Honorary Secretary of Liverpool Diocese to Rudolf, 21/9/1906.
288 Case file 9664, letter from Mrs. Frank S, c. July 1907.
289 For literature on siblings roles as carers, see Ross, Love and Toil, pp. 148–155.
290 Case file 9445, letter from Catherine A to Rudolf, 11/2/1907.
291 Case file 9445, letter from Catherine A, 7/11/1911 and reply from Rudolf, date unknown.
capable, caring and ‘worthy’ mother in the eyes of the institution. Her final statement enquiring when Lily would return suggested an entitlement to remove the child, confirming that she had not absolutely sacrificed her rights to her child. Lily returned to her mother in April 1907 but was readmitted to the home only a few weeks later and placed in service. No reason for her readmission is recorded, but a further request from the mother to remove her daughter in 1911 was denied and the institution made arrangements for Lily to enter employment in London, a considerable distance from her mother’s home in Winchester.292

Decisions to restore children to their families centred on the Society’s assessment of their circumstances and character. Like Lily’s mother, other relatives appeared to have been acutely aware of the criteria they were required to fulfil in order to ensure children’s return, and letters reflect this. Thomas T’s mother wrote to the Society to request his return home, stating:

I want you to let us have Tommy home as we are settled down here now and his father is in good work. We might as well have him with us now, there is a nice school for him to go to and it is a beautiful place to live in Boston Spa.293

The letter made reference to a number of domestic requirements that the family had achieved to strengthen the appeal for his return home. Improved circumstances relating to the location and environment of their new home, as well as employment and education helped the parents to emphasise that it was unnecessary for the institution to care for him since they were now capable of doing so. Letters from influential individuals from the local community, such as clergymen, were commonly sent to the institution to support relatives’ appeals for children’s return home. To ensure the likelihood of Thomas’ return, a letter from Miss Bethell, a lady from the local community interested in the case, emphasised that ‘there seems to be no reason why the Society should keep the boy if the parents can do so. The mother is a respectable woman or appears to be so’.294 The boy returned to his family shortly after receipt of Miss Bethell’s letter in April 1905.

292 Ibid.
293 Case file 9455, letter from Mrs. T to Miss Arthur, c. April 1905.
In some cases, institutional representatives inspected homes and interviewed relatives requesting children’s removals. These inspectors assumed a similar role to that of the lady visitors who evaluated the moral character of poor families through the physical assessment of domestic environments and individuals’ appearances.\(^{295}\) WSS inspectors critiqued the occupations, earnings and perceived moral character of relatives in order to assess their ability to adequately care for the child. These judgements were likely to have been, in many cases, subjective, narrow and prejudiced in their scope. The appearance of children’s relatives could rarely provide an accurate indication of their ability to care for children nor for the love and devotion they felt for them.

WSS agent Harry Simpson visited Emma C’s stepmother’s home and reported her to be a ‘most trustworthy woman in whose hands the future of Emma can safely be confided’. Emma’s father and stepmother were observed to be employed and that they were likely to ‘bestow upon her a great deal of affection and care’.\(^{296}\) The Society, ‘favourably impressed’ with their circumstances returned Emma home, but only three months later, the circumstances had deteriorated due to illness in the family. Emma was also noted to have become unruly and unsettled through her stepmother’s lack of management. Institutional correspondence stated that Emma wished to return to her previous institutional home.\(^{297}\) She was duly readmitted and later placed out in a Church Army Women’s Home.\(^{298}\)

In other cases, appearances could be deliberately deceptive. Some relatives fostered an impression of respectability and better fortune to mislead the institution in order to reclaim children. After her husband’s death, William R’s mother struggled to support her three children, and William was admitted to care in 1905.\(^{299}\) Reverend Sanders petitioned for William’s return on the mother’s behalf in 1909, confirming that her circumstances had improved considerably. He stated that his mother also wanted William to take up an apprenticeship and

\(^{295}\) Livesey, ‘Reading for Character’, pp. 43–67.
\(^{296}\) Case file 10690, letter from Harry Simpson to Rudolf, June 1910.
\(^{297}\) Case file 10690, see letter from Miss Martindale to Rudolf, 17/9/1910; letter from Miss Bailey to Rudolf, 17/11/1910; Letter from Rudolf to Miss Robinson (Church Army Women’s Homes), 23/11/1910.
\(^{298}\) Case file 10690, letter from Rudolf to Miss Robinson, 23/11/1910.
\(^{299}\) Case file 10699, referral letter from Annie Sanders, January 1905.
emphasised that there was no reason why he should not return home. William returned to his mother on Christmas Eve, but was readmitted on the 3rd January 1910 after the Society discovered that his mother was not ‘in a position to provide a suitable home for her son’.

It is possible that William’s mother misled both Reverence Sanders and the institution as to her capacity to support her son in order for him to return home over Christmas. Despite her inability to keep her son, she was determined to remove him from the institution: an appeal for his removal a month later was denied. A year later, she travelled from her home in Leicester to visit her son in London. William’s master allowed him out of the home until 9pm with his mother. Whilst 9pm was late in the evening for inmates to be out, there is no evidence to suggest that this was a customary arrangement for visiting days at the Pimlico Home. It is likely that an agreement for him to be returned at 9 was dependant on the personality of the master and the trust he placed in William’s mother. However, the Pimlico master received a telegram later in the evening from William’s mother stating that she had taken him home feeling certain that the Society would raise no objection to her action. The master notified Rudolf of William’s removal and reassured him that not only did the mother seem in a position to look after him, but also that William was also over 16 and able to look for work. The case file indicates that no attempt was made to pursue him after his removal.

Whilst inspections of relatives’ homes made it difficult for some children to return home, other obstacles could also be put in place to discourage the practice of removing inmates. WSS regulations stated that relatives who desired to remove inmates were required to reimburse the institution at a sum of 5 shillings per week for the duration of the child’s institutional care, if no payment had been contributed in the past. This expense sought to discourage children’s removal but in practice, did little to stop numerous requests for children to return home. Furthermore, in most cases, the policy of repayment was seldom

300 Case file 10699, letter to Rudolf from unknown WSS representative, date unknown.
301 Case file 10699, letter to JF Kempson from Rudolf, 4/1/1910.
302 Case file 10699, letter from Annie Sanders to Rudolf, 14/2/1910.
303 Case file 10699, letter from Mr. Henry, Pimlico House Boys Brigade to Rudolf, 27/1/1911 and telegram from Elizabeth R to the Society, 27/1/1911.
304 Case file 10699, letter from Mr Henry to Rudolf, 27/1/1911.
implemented. One case file, however, does indicate relatives’ reimbursement of the WSS. Edith A was admitted to the Society on 21st June 1900 as her guardian, Mrs A, was too poor to care for her after her husband’s death.\(^\text{305}\) A month later, however, Mrs A wrote to Rudolf to state that Edith was much missed by the family:

\[\ldots\text{I have seen my brother and he is much broken-hearted at giving up this poor little one, and we do hope and trust that we can have her. If there is a small trifle to pay for her keep he will see what can be done…}\]\(^\text{306}\)

Having offered to reimburse the Society in exchange for her return, Rudolf consented on the condition that Mrs A repaid a total of 15 shillings for the time Edith had been in care.\(^\text{307}\) Although Mrs. A had claimed poverty upon application with no relatives to financially support her, she managed to reimburse the institution and Edith returned home a few days later in August 1900. Nevertheless, requests for repayment appear to be uncommon suggesting this policy was not often enforced. In Edith’s case, the institution’s decision to request reimbursement may only have been implemented since Mrs A’s letter alluded to it.

Many requests for inmates’ return home were denied, and these decisions were often based on institutional perceptions that relatives were immoral, cruel or not respectable. Several case files indicate institutional anxieties that if such requests were complied with, children might be placed in danger or that the hard work, care and training invested in caring for inmates would be wasted upon their return home. The Society did not agree to Henry S’s return to his grandmother who was noted to have brought him up well despite her poverty and illness.\(^\text{308}\) Instead, the institution believed it was in his best interests that he continue his training until the age of 15 in order to have the best possible start at becoming independent, rather than returning home to support his grandmother. Despite not having any legal claim over the boy, the WSS refused the grandmother’s request and reminded her that she had agreed to wholly commit

\(^{305}\) Case file 7689, application form, June 1900.
\(^{306}\) Case file 7689, letter from Mrs. A to Rudolf, 30/7/1900.
\(^{307}\) Case file 7689, letter from Rudolf to Mrs. A, c. July/August 1900.
\(^{308}\) Case file 10671, application form, 9/1/1905.
the boy to their care at the time of application.\textsuperscript{309} The Society’s attempt to discourage Henry’s removal was successful and he remained in care.

Institutional staff also expressed concern that relatives only requested inmates’ return home when they became old enough to earn, thus becoming useful commodities to relatives.\textsuperscript{310} Maggie V was removed by her brother and father having reached the age of 16 and able to earn a living as an under-housemaid.\textsuperscript{311} Although referrer Bessie Guillon advised Maggie to take a situation that allowed her to live away from her family, she informed the institution that Maggie’s relatives were averse to this because ‘they find her money convenient, for she has been paying them practically all she has earned’.\textsuperscript{312} That relatives recognised children’s power to earn upon leaving the institution highlights a complex nexus of attachment and economy.

As Deborah Cohen suggests, giving up a child to an institution or to adoptive parents, was understood as a great act of maternal love, which parents were encouraged by institutions to believe would afford their children better and happier childhoods. Yet, in practice, parents could be reluctant to let go of their children forever, and their return to their families in order to contribute economically suggests a reciprocal notion of familial responsibility existed between children and parents. Whilst money did matter in some families, children’s earning power could also operate as a bond of attachment, through acknowledgement of shared responsibilities and obligations.\textsuperscript{313}

Yet even when these appeals were denied, relatives did not abandon hope of being reunited with children. Numerous case files demonstrate that relatives, whose requests for children’s return had been denied, reclaimed them once they entered employment.\textsuperscript{314} The practice of reclaiming children from employment highlights that relatives were highly aware of the stages at which institutional authority waned. It is possible too, that relatives were reluctant to remove

\textsuperscript{309} Case file 10671, letter to Mrs. Finney, c. March 1911.
\textsuperscript{310} Murdoch has also made reference to this. Murdoch, \textit{Imagined Orphans}, pp. 117–118.
\textsuperscript{311} Case file 9397, letter from Lady Superintendent, Cold Ash Home, to Rudolf, 17/2/1906.
\textsuperscript{312} Case file 9397, letter from Bessie Guillon to Miss Walters, c. November 1906.
\textsuperscript{313} For children’s economic contribution the family, see Ross, \textit{Love and Toil}, pp. 148–162; Murdoch, \textit{Imagined Orphans}, pp. 117–118.
\textsuperscript{314} See case file 10683, letter from matron, St Cuthbert’s Home to Rudolf, 22/10/1910; and, 9397, letter from Lady Superintendent, Cold Ash Home to Rudolf, 17/2/1906.
children from institutional care because they were unaware of their legal rights and power over children, and considered application and consent forms as binding contracts.

Disputes regarding custody of children are rare. Following the death of her parents, Alice S and her 6 siblings were cared for by her 19-year-old brother Fred. His work was seasonal, however, and he applied for Alice’s admission to the institution in 1887 with the support of Katharine E, the Sister In Charge at the Eton Mission House in Hackney. A few months after admission, the WSS made arrangements for Alice to be adopted by Thomas Moore and his wife, following their enquiries with the institution about adopting a girl of 2-3 years of age. Mr and Mrs. Moore removed Alice in February 1888 for a trial of six months. Approaching the end of her trial, the institution asked Sister Katharine to obtain the family’s consent for Alice’s adoption. She stated that she had ‘communicated with the relatives and find that they are willing the Alice should be entirely adopted’. It is unclear whether the relatives were informed that Alice was to be adopted by the couple rather than the institution itself.

A month after Sister Katharine had obtained consent for Alice’s adoption, Fred wrote a series of short letters to the institution requesting Alice’s return home. Although Sister Katharine informed the Society that she had tried to dissuade Fred from requesting his sister’s return, she indicated that he had misunderstood the terms of giving her up, and was unhappy that he would only be able to hear of her progress, rather than remain in contact with her. Meanwhile, a draft legal agreement for Alice’s adoption was drawn up, although a note reminded the parties that ‘the Law of England does not recognise adoption and that a guardian cannot in fact give up his powers, though he may agree to do so’. Given Fred’s requests for Alice’s removal, the institution wrote to notify Mr and Mrs Moore that they were unable to proceed with the adoption at the

315 Case file 1214, application form, 11/9/1888.
316 Case file 1214, letter from Mr Moore, 19/12/1887.
317 Although adoption was not ‘legal’ until 1926, informal adoption between institutions and middle-class families was fairly common. For the complexities of this type of adoption, see Cohen, *Family Secrets*, pp. 113–143; Nelson, *Family ties in Victorian England*, pp. 145–172.
318 Case file 1214, letter from Eton Mission, June 1888.
319 Case file 1214, see letters from Fred to Rudolf, 2/8/1888; 18/8/1888; and, 23/8/1888.
320 Case file 1214, see letter from Eton Mission to Rudolf, 24/7/1888.
321 Case file 1214, articles of agreement for adoption, 9/8/1888.
present time. Subsequent correspondence is both harrowing in content and highlights the strength of feeling and reluctance of all parties to give up the child.322

In attempts to influence the Society and to demonstrate his rights over the child, Mr Moore emphasised the love and attachment his family had cultivated for the child, and his grief at the ‘possibility of the child being taken’ from them:

Our love for the child is equally as great as if we’re indeed her parents…the child has grown very dear to all our relatives and friends, more especially to my sister and niece…323

Seemingly concerned with the child’s wellbeing, Mr Moore also argued that ‘it would indeed be a cruelty in the greatest degree to take away a child so exceedingly happy in her present surroundings’. He also apportioned much blame to the Society for the circumstances and the manner in which the case had been dealt with:

We were of course under the impression that…a legal document by which the relatives relinquished all future claim had been prepared and duly signed. If this is not done, what a terrible playing with the feelings of those actuated by the most sacred motives results.324

In apparent disbelief he questioned Fred’s motives and character, asking ‘Why have the brother’s feelings changed so suddenly? Is he not actuated by mercenary motives?’ At the close of his letter he made clear his expectations regarding the matter, and threatened that if the results were not in his favour, the publicity of the matter would be unfavourable for the institution:

I have felt it necessary to request my solicitor to deal with the matter…I trust you will be able to obtain the brother’s signature which will avoid all future trouble in the matter…as if the circumstances were to be more public by recourse to legal proceedings, it would indeed have a very deterrent effect upon all similarly disposed people as ourselves…no court of law would

322 For the dynamics of attachment between adoptive parents and adopted children, see Cohen, Family Secrets, pp. 113–143.
323 Case file 1214, letter from Mr Moore, 20/8/1888.
324 Ibid.
recognize a proceeding so detrimental to the child’s future welfare… 325

Not all correspondence survives in the case file but by August 1888, Fred had agreed, whether willing or not, to leave Alice with the Moore family on the condition that he might visit her once a year, although the family were reluctant with the visitation arrangement. 326 A letter six months later from Mrs Moore, however, notified the institution of Alice’s death from diphtheria following scarlet fever. 327 It is unknown if this was true, since no note from a medical officer confirming this survives in the case file. It is possible that the Moore’s hoped this would resolve their difficulties in absolutely adopting Alice as their own. If this was a fictional story, it appears to have been successful – the WSS closed Alice’s case file and there was no record of any further negotiation or communication regarding the matter.

These types of disputes are rare amongst case files, since only a small percentage of children were removed from the institution’s care through adoption. 328 Although anomalous, this case file is valuable in demonstrating the institution’s periodic willingness to ignore relatives’ legal rights over children. Since the WSS allowed contact between Fred and Alice, albeit annually, it is likely that the Society was unwilling break their contract with the Moore family who had agreed to maintain and care for her, in order to return her to her biological family. Although Fred’s attempts to reclaim his sister were unsuccessful, the persistence of his endeavours nevertheless indicates his refusal to give up his rights as her guardian. For individuals such as the Moore family, however, greater financial power and influence allowed them to obtain legal advice to negotiate a satisfactory outcome. Given the necessity to compete for donations by continually legitimising their work, it is probable that the threat of legal proceedings and negative publicity drove the Society’s decision not to return Alice to her brother’s care.

325 Ibid.
326 Ibid.
327 Case file 1214, letter from Mrs. Moore to Rudolf, 19/1/1889.
The preceding cases demonstrate that some relatives had little authority to effect children’s return home. Yet when the Society deemed it necessary to discharge seemingly ‘unsuitable’ inmates, relatives were powerless to prevent children’s return home, even when they were incapable of caring adequately for them. Anxious not to be burdened with inmates who would never be able to become independent through illness or disability, application forms clearly outlined the institutional authority to return children to relatives when required:

Should a case be found unsuitable, after admission, the Committee reserves to itself the right of removing it to one of the Society’s other Homes, or calling upon the friends of the child to arrange its removal.  

This clause meant that the institution could return children directly to relatives or friends, instead of having to negotiate with other organisations for admission elsewhere.

Stanley C, admitted from West Moreland workhouse in 1905, was discharged back to his parents in 1911, aged 10. His increasing frequency of bed-wetting, commonly understood to be associated with emotional disturbance from the early twentieth century, was deemed ‘incurable’ by the institution who feared they would not be able to place him in residential employment. Frederick P also returned to his parents after the Society was unable to find him employment because of a facial disfiguration. Discharging children in order to reduce expenditure was not always in the child’s best interests, and further contradicted the very basis of ‘rescue’ and ‘welfare’ on which the institution operated.

Annie J, described as ‘very rough and very ignorant’ but ‘not naturally or morally bad’ by referrer Louise Moulton, was considered to be too difficult to control and a moral threat to other inmates at the Fareham Home. Moulton had warned the institution that an ‘undesirable stepfather and a very bad sister’ might

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329 HLR case file 2434, see application form 26/4/1890 and medical certificate, 26/4/1890.
331 Case file 9407, letter from Islington School to Rudolf, 7/9/1905.
attempt to remove Annie and urged them not to let this occur on any account. Yet only a few months later, contrary to Moulton’s wishes, Annie returned to her family after her matron begged the Society to relieve her of the girl. There is no record indicating that the institution enquired about or inspected the family’s circumstances of home environment before her discharge.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated the ways in which biological relatives negotiated their authority and rights within the institution in order to maintain a significant and meaningful role in children’s lives. Examination of relatives’ correspondence that demonstrates their refusal to give up their children completely has drawn attention to the more complex and enduring roles biological family members assumed in children’s lives whilst placed in institutional care. Examination of relatives’ resistance to institutional authority, policies and contracts also highlights the tensions that arose in the provision of childcare, and positions the poor as agents, rather than passive victims of institutional policy in the charitable relationship.

Moreover, correspondence offers a valuable and nuanced narrative of the strategies they employed to express agency and articulate rights and expectations. Analysis of the institution’s response to demands and appeals concerning relatives’ rights, power and expectations also reveals a sensitivity and flexibility in institutional approaches and understanding of ‘family’. At the very least, institutional responses indicate that the Society was reluctant to wholly exclude biological relatives from their notion of what constituted ‘family’ for inmates. Indeed, the chapter illustrates that exchanges between the institution and welfare dependants that were based on mutuality, collaboration, dispute, negotiation and navigation all highlight that methods of child welfare and provision of assistance in the late nineteenth century were much more complicated than historians have previously assumed.

The notion of home is pursued in the next chapter. Departing from analysis of the nurturing social relationships built within and beyond the institution central to the first two chapters, chapter three focusses on the idea of

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332 Case file 10679, case note regarding Miss Moulton’s visit to WSS office, 13/1/1906.
333 Case file 10679, letter from Rudolf to Miss Moulton, 26/11/1906.
home to consider children’s nurture and belonging in material terms. The Victorian children’s institution has rarely been understood to function as a home. Instead, popular imaginings of the children’s welfare institution have been shaped by Dickensian representations of oppressive, miserable and harsh establishments where inmates were cruelly treated and materially deprived. Examination of the material culture of the institution, as well as the interactions within this space, however, demonstrates how welfare environments were shaped by domestic ideals and set against notions of the imagined home. The next chapter, therefore, highlights the ways in which a notion of homeliness underpinned ideologies and practices of non-state welfare institutions.
CHAPTER THREE

Homeliness in the nineteenth-century children’s institution

Within the context of nineteenth-century welfare, the idea of ‘home’ was central to the care provided by a range of residential institutions. Recent scholarship has focussed on the ways in which ideals of home permeated institutional ideology for different inmate populations and how they might imagine these spaces as homes. Research by Jane Hamlett, Lesley Hoskins and Rebecca Preston, for example, has demonstrated how the material culture, environment and interactions within residential institutions such as asylums, public schools and lodging houses, were shaped by domestic ideals and set against notions of the imagined and ideal home.334

Aside from public schools, institutions for children have largely been omitted from studies of domesticity. Murdoch and Abrams have pointed to the types of institutional environments in which children were cared for during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but their discussions of domesticity in the children’s institution are almost incidental to the broader examination of children’s welfare, reform and training. Murdoch’s research on Barnardo’s cottage homes, for example, traces the ways in which middle-class household values and political ideologies shaped the domestic, educational and social cultures within the home environments.335 Meanwhile, Abram’s research on the institutional care of welfare children in Quarrier’s orphanage homes in Scotland questions the extent to which the structure of the homes and children’s daily routines met inhabitants’ material and physical needs. Her work concludes that these homes fell substantially short in providing adequate emotional care for children.336 Thus, the dominant model of the children’s welfare institution remains one of barren, regimented and uniform space and experience.

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That historians have given little attention to questions of domesticity and ‘home’ within the children’s institution is surprising since welfare reformers acknowledged the inadequacies associated with caring for children housed in large institutions. Policy makers, reformers and institutional authorities critiqued the suitability and quality of the home environments from which inmates arrived and debated the best practice around which to structure the institutional ‘home’. In a report for the Local Government Board, for example, Jane Nassau Senior noted that overcrowding, moral corruption, lack of individual attention within the institution, and the effects of prolonged confinement hindered some children’s success later in life.337 Instead, welfare reformers and institutional officials increasingly acknowledged the importance of creating a sense of home and affective family life for children’s comfort and emotional development during the later nineteenth century. Reformers believed that these ideals could be cultivated in small-scale ‘cottage’ homes, ‘village’ and boarding-out systems of foster care.338

As the introduction to the thesis highlighted, these systems of care were promoted and adopted as preferential models by child welfare organisations for the provision of childcare in later decades of the century. Small cottage homes sought to imitate the ideal family home where matrons and masters became ‘parent’ figures to the inmates they assumed responsibility for.339 Even in larger institutional homes, including children’s training homes, specific sets of domestic ideals were manifest in interior decoration, routines, movement and the interpersonal relationships established within the spaces. In addition, other daily routines and practices promoted inmates’ individuality, such as the elimination of uniforms and identification numbers, which are explored further in the following


339 Murdoch, Imagined Orphans, p. 61.
chapter. It is curious then, that little scholarship has focussed on ‘home’ in the children’s institution since ideals of the ‘home’ appeared to permeate the very basis of their mission and operations.

A growing interest in the study of material culture has had important implications for studies of domesticity and ideological concepts of the home. Definitions of ‘home’, ‘homeliness’ and ‘domestic’ are complex and dynamic, and their understanding varied widely according to the cultural and social groups that used and interpreted them. Scholarship on the home has acknowledged these differences and has sought to consider a variety of elements relating to the home site for various social groups, both in terms of its physicality and its ‘domesticity’ – that is, the lived experience of the home and the routines of family life enacted therein. The majority of this research has concentrated on the study of middle-class home and the implications that patterns of domestic consumption had on individual agency, self-expression, social relations and identity.

Cohen’s research on the middle-class home charts the growing nineteenth-century infatuation with the idealised ‘home’ and the home as a castle. Her research highlights the increasing sense of pride taken in the material adornment of the home and the preoccupation with displaying items that reflected inhabitants’ personality. In particular, material objects in the home could communicate inhabitants’ status, aspirations, ideals and morality. The material adornment of the home also elevated a sense of ‘homeliness’: a concept meaning ‘of the home’ or ‘home-like’ that referred to the feeling and appearance

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341 Material culture has been defined as ‘the social meaning of the physical world of things’. See Judith Attfield, Wild Things: the Material Culture of Everyday Life (Oxford, 2000), p. 15.  
343 Cohen, Household Gods, pp. 1–32.
of the space, which was inextricably bound up with the idealised material place and the relationships enacted therein. The terms ‘homeliness’ and ‘homely’, evoke a sense of comfort, security, intimacy and familiarity associated with the home-space, and are defined as such in this thesis.

In addition, recent scholarship has also begun to re-evaluate the home-life of the poorer classes and the different meanings invested in ‘home’, ‘homeliness’ and ‘domesticity’ from the early modern period, across the social scale. With a growing emphasis on home as a sanctuary and a vessel of inhabitants’ identity as Deborah Cohen has drawn attention to, a range of ‘homely’ ideals were translated into other types of residential settings beyond middle-class homes. John Styles, for example, argues that poor and often transient inhabitants of lodging houses during the eighteenth-century made deliberate attempts to dress their rooms with fashionable items that were often well beyond their means in order to communicate an aspirational status. Jane Hamlett further argues that photographs of personal spaces in nineteenth-century institutional spaces such as boarding schools, student rooms and asylums, reflect inhabitants’ efforts to make these sites unique, comforting and ‘homely’ in appearance. Meanwhile, Emily Cuming’s study of the material culture of nineteenth-century slums suggests that, although seemingly uncanny in their appearance, rooms were often decorated in such a way as to indicate that poorer

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345 Cohen, Household Gods, pp. 1–32.


347 Hamlett, Material relations, pp. 144–180.
families were not only aware of, but also guided by contemporary ideals of the home. 

Whilst studies of the home have tended to focus on the physical and material aspects of the site, sociological and anthropological analysis has examined the home as an idea or illusion. A large body of this scholarship has acknowledged the significance of home as a focus for the sociological gaze that offers greater understanding of inhabitants’ identification of domestic ideals. Examining the individual’s relationship with home through movement and objects placed within the environment, research has analysed how domestic experiences influenced broader social interactions and helped to shape individual identity. Thus, ‘home’ has often been interpreted as a site that embodies inhabitants’ intimacy, personal experience, memory and imagination. Importantly too, home is a site that elicits and communicates inhabitants’ emotional responses.

This chapter adds to this growing body of research by examining institutional ideals of ‘home’ and attempts to create a ‘homely’ site for child inmates. To do so, the first section of the chapter focusses the material culture of the institution. It traces the development of the WSS’s domestic idiom of homeliness that centred on the desire to create comfortable, beautiful and nurturing environments that would help shape the moral, emotional and social growth of inmates. The section also explores the material goods and possessions in the institution and how they sought to enhance inmates’ feelings of being ‘at home’ and their sense of belonging. The second section examines how the spaces of the institution constructed, defined and reinforced domestic authority and considers how this shaped inmates’ sense of home and household relations. The chapter argues that boundaries, rules and regulations established within WSS

348 Emily Cuming, “‘Home is home be it never so homely’: Reading Mid-Victorian Slum Interiors”, Journal of Victorian Culture, 18 (2013), pp. 268–386.
homes should not necessarily be interpreted as solely disciplinary and in conflict
with the notion of ‘homeliness’. Analysis also highlights how authoritative
boundaries were tested by inmates’ behaviour and articulation of resistance –
acts which underscored the dynamics at play in the interpersonal relationships
within the institution.

By examining institutional ideals of homeliness the thesis suggests that
greater reconsideration of how the institution could function as a home as well as
how children experienced the site in physical terms is needed. In particular,
given the increasing scholarly focus on a range of institutions and the study of
the home, the popular view of the children’s welfare institution as a bleak and
drab establishment is ripe for re-evaluation. The chapter argues that institutional
authorities did acknowledge the importance of creating environments for young
inhabitants that extended beyond their primary function as basic shelters for
welfare recipients. Thus, the chapter brings material culture to an established
literature on children’s welfare in order to challenge the pervasiveness of
conclusions that the children’s institution was unable to or not interested in
providing a homely and nurturing environment for its inhabitants. By considering
the ideology of home in the WSS context, the chapter complicates institutional
narratives that position children as unindividualised subjects. Instead, it identifies
the institution as an imagined and ideological space that shaped children’s
experiences in multiple ways.

**Ideologies of ‘home’**

The Society’s governing philosophy from its foundation in 1881 was to create
sites of ‘homeliness’ for WSS children. A concern with WSS home-life within an
institutional model of ‘family’ care frequently appeared as a note-worthy subject
in WSS monthly magazines for patrons and supporters. The Society’s notion
of home was shaped by contemporary ideologies governing the domestic
architecture and interiors of middle-class homes. By the late nineteenth century,
a wealth of didactic literature promoted the well-ordered and fashionable home

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as a private, domestic haven separate from the public world of labour among the Victorian middle classes.\textsuperscript{351}

Within the WSS institution, attempts to create a sense of homeliness were reflected in the domestic architecture and spatial layout of the home. By the late nineteenth century, the WSS was not unique in promoting the benefits of establishing comfortable, ‘homely’ retreats for inmates. As the introduction to the thesis demonstrated, there was a growing preference amongst welfare reformers and institutional staff to care for children in family-type environments rather than larger punitive institutions that had been previously used to house inmates.\textsuperscript{352} Contemporary critiques of institutional care and treatment of inmate populations contributed to the development of small, ‘homely’ retreats where daily life was shaped by reformatory instead of punitive measures.\textsuperscript{353}

Favouring the trend to establish smaller home environments that promoted nurture to aid the development and comfort of inmates, the WSS rejected the practice of caring for children in large, barrack-style settings. The Society proclaimed their commitment to this model of care arguing that it was ‘infinitely better to care for children under natural conditions’ in order to ‘develop home instincts’, rather than to ‘mass children in huge Poor-Law or other institutions’.\textsuperscript{354} Size of home, as well as its interior arrangement and furnishing therefore, became instrumental in establishing the Society’s ideal of homeliness in architectural and spatial form. The ‘natural conditions’ that the Society referred to, although seemingly paradoxical in relation to the institutional environment, were believed to be recreated most successfully albeit artificially, in the smaller cottage-home model.

The size of institutional homes, therefore, became a central aspect in establishing a sense of homeliness in spatial and architectural form. Size of


\textsuperscript{352} See introduction to thesis, pp. 11–15.


\textsuperscript{354} \textit{Waifs and Strays Society Annual Report, December 1887}, p. 5.
homes was also an important element in creating a sense of ‘family’ and intimacy, as the first chapter of the thesis has drawn attention to. Whilst other cottage homes, such as Barnardo’s, usually housed between twenty and forty children, some WSS homes were smaller in size.\textsuperscript{355} Of the 108 homes operating in 1911, forty-five of these housed fewer than twenty residents. Many of these homes had ten inhabitants or less, which included some of the youngest of the WSS’s inmates. The Rose Cottage in Devon housed just seven girls in 1901, the All Saint’s Home in Ashdon cared for eight or nine boys, whilst only six inhabitants constituted the ‘family’ at St Bartholomew’s Home in Wiltshire. Smaller homes most likely helped institutional staff to gain a more intimate knowledge of the children they cared for, and enabled them to offer inmates with the individual support and guidance – duties associated with the role of biological parents.\textsuperscript{356}

Meanwhile, fifty-two homes imitated Barnardo’s system of housing between twenty and forty children, usually older in age and beginning to prepare for their training. In addition, eleven homes provided training for older children to enable them to earn a living upon discharge, and these usually housed more than forty residents. These homes included the Society’s temporary receiving homes that provided shelter to the most urgent cases, before inmates’ placement in more permanent homes across the country. In addition, many of the largest homes were specialist in nature, requiring large spaces to house machinery such as printing works, where children completed training and apprenticeships.

Although all WSS cottage homes usually housed a greater number of inhabitants than the biological family home, the Society believed that the smaller size of the homes might enable the closer representation of home and family life within these sites, as well as children’s emotional development. This, they considered, was most likely achieved through the personal relationships and close bonds created between co-residents in the institutional ‘family’, which Poor Law and other large institutions could not facilitate. The smaller size also reflected the age of their younger inhabitants, and suggests the Society’s policy that younger children would benefit the most from the more personal, intimate atmosphere within these sites. Smaller homes were likely to have allowed for a

\textsuperscript{355} Murdoch, \textit{Imagined Orphans}, pp. 43–66.
\textsuperscript{356} See Appendix 1.
greater level of individual pastoral care for each child, as well as close supervision over their upbringing.\(^{357}\)

That the Society had a range of homes to house varying numbers of inhabitants meant that diverse types of buildings were required. Photographs depict the difference in scale and architectural style of the homes that the Society saw fit for the purpose of caring for children, ranging from small cottage homes to larger, imposing villas that housed a greater number of inmates (figures 7 and 8). It is unlikely that space, even within some of the smaller homes was overcrowded, and inhabitants were unlikely to have felt cramped within the home. The plentiful space within some WSS homes was quite different to average middle-class homes, which in many cases as Hamlett suggests, could be quite small and congested.\(^{358}\) This range of homes, in all likelihood, resulted in children’s conflicted understanding of ‘home’, especially if they experienced more than one type of home whilst in the Society’s care. Nevertheless, these homes were not that different to those that many children would experience when leaving care and going into domestic service.\(^{359}\)

Despite the range of sizes of WSS homes, the Society stressed that their residential environments ‘are really Homes, and are not large institutions’.\(^{360}\) Whilst the Society’s smaller homes may indeed have appeared to be more ‘homely’ than larger institutions, this statement indicates that the WSS promoted all their homes – whether large or small – as more ‘homely’ than other institutions. Although inmates residing in larger WSS training homes were unlikely to have felt ‘at home’, it is probable that the materiality of the space and the social relations in the institution intended to help inmates to experience the site as ‘homely’ to some degree.

\(^{357}\) For accounts of inmate ages, smaller homes and family life therein, see ‘Lee Cottage Home’, *Our Waifs and Strays* (November, 1888), pp. 4–5; ‘A Round of Visits’, *Our Waifs and Strays* (October, 1900), p. 377
\(^{358}\) Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 3.
The materiality of WSS residential spaces was a vital element in conveying a sense of ‘homeliness’. Within the institutional setting, these spaces borrowed components from the middle-class domestic ideals of comfort, beauty and privacy. Articles published in monthly institutional literature, although produced with specific fundraising intent, provide insight into how the Society
envisioned and presented the ideal institutional home. Beauty, comfort and permanence of home, in particular, were positioned by the WSS as the primary means of creating a sense of homeliness for inmates inhabiting the institution. Literature also demonstrates that the WSS used material ideals to nurture and inculcate moral values in its inmates.

One article reminded readers of the institution’s mission to create a ‘permanent environment of brightness, warmth, and “homeliness”’ within the institution. Implicit in this notion was the idea that the home had a psychological role in providing inmates with a space in which they might feel at ease, as well as a sense of belonging. This would help inmates overcome the estrangement from the familiar environments of the biological home and the psychological unease of being parted from relatives. In doing so, however, there were class tensions and competing concepts of home in operation between poor families and middle-class institutions. For WSS inmates, the institutional ‘home’, based on middle-class domestic ideals, most likely bore little or no relation to the working-class homes from which they had come.

WSS home ideals sought to provide institutional inmates with some material comfort whilst teaching children domestic and familial values that the Society deemed imperative for inmates’ transformation. Moreover, these spaces also sought to teach children, the majority of whom were being trained for domestic service, how the middle-class home functioned and how to conduct themselves appropriately within this space. As such, despite the Society’s efforts to construct a sense of ‘homeliness’ for inmates, the institutional home that primarily sought to train children in middle-class domestic ideals, was unlikely to have felt familiar or ‘homely’.

As a welfare institution with a clear objective to rescue children from undesirable and immoral environments, permanency was central to the model of homeliness the Society promoted. The statement above emphasised the importance of children’s permanency in the institutional home, as did their mission statement to ‘provide destitute, outcast and friendless children with

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362 Delap has drawn attention to the tensions and unfamiliarity emotionally and materially, implicit in domestic servants inhabiting the middle-class home environment. Delap, Knowing their Place, pp. 26–63.
permanent homes’. As chapters one and two demonstrated, whilst the institution seldom prohibited relatives’ contact with children altogether, clauses in WSS application forms sought to establish permanency in the institution by demanding relatives to relinquish their rights over children. In addition, the temporary admission of children was discouraged through the Society’s proclaimed right to demand reimbursement for the cost of inmates’ care should relatives wish to remove children.

Upon admission, children were sent to WSS institutions across the country, which were to serve as inmates’ permanent home. The placement patterns of inmates suggest that the ideal of physical permanency within a single home was not usually attained. Children admitted at a young age might experience a minimum of three homes that catered for specific age ranges and needs, if they remained in care until sixteen years of age. Infants were usually boarded out until the age of five or six, and then placed in one of the institution’s residential homes. Upon reaching the age of twelve to fourteen, inmates were usually sent to larger training homes from which they entered employment. As the final chapter examines in detail, the institution encouraged inmates to keep in contact with their former carers, and it is possible that the Society imagined such contact as a model that created continuity across their different institutions.

Longevity within the institutional home, could also be negated in a number of other ways. Transferring inmates to specialist homes to cater for medical, educational or training needs could disrupt children’s sense of home and belonging. The institution’s continued growth and the need for larger or specific types of premises also resulted in inmates’ transferrals to other WSS homes or different organisations. Following the trend in Victorian society to rent rather than purchase property, the majority of the Society’s homes were leased, with the WSS preferring to adapt homes to suit their function rather than investing in ‘bricks and mortar’.

Leased space allowed the flexibility to

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364 See appendix 1. The Ashurst girls’ home closed in 1888 and the inhabitants were transferred to another home. Meanwhile, St Alban’s boys’ home closed in 1897 due to a lack of referral of boys needing substitute homes in the area. In 1889, the girls in the Beckett Home for Babies in Leeds were transferred to St Agnes’ Home in Yorkshire.
discontinue renting a specific building should WSS needs or fortune dictate otherwise. Inmates’ perceived troublesome behaviour could also result in their transferral to another home for stricter discipline, which disrupted a sense of permanency for them and their former housemates. In addition, relatives’ removal of inmates meant that for some children, their time in care could be relatively short – in 1904, the WSS stated that the average period children spent in their care was approximately four years. Despite their attempts to provide inmates with a ‘permanent’ home during their time in care, in practice, institutional homes were unstable and transient in their physicality, location and in the composition of inhabitants that formed the institutional family unit.

Despite a seeming lack of permanency in terms of inmates residing in a single home, placing children of similar ages together in the same institution helped to create a sense of permanency through age cohesion over the ‘permanence’ of place. This type of age-related care and consequently the makeup of the institutional ‘family’ within a single home, was not wholly incompatible with the idea of permanency or stability. Furthermore, although institutional homes had different purposes, the notion of homeliness was standardised across the institution. Whilst some WSS homes were much larger than some of their smaller cottage-home models, it is probable that the same ideals in terms of interior decoration and arrangement of space, examined below, permeated all WSS homes to some degree.

**Interior spaces and materiality of the homes**

Notions of beauty and comfort became primary elements through which an atmosphere of homeliness was constituted within the institutional residence. Beauty, however, was perceived not merely through outward aesthetic value but also through moral significance. By the later half of the nineteenth century there had been a marked change in consumer patterns and the expression of taste amongst the middling ranks of society. Rising incomes, falling prices of luxury goods, and an increasing decline in the evangelical austerity and atonement that

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366 For transferral due to ‘troublesome’ behaviour see case files: 9452; 11052; 11058; 18349; 1140; 15273; and, 10993. Many of these children displayed ‘consistently troublesome’ but seemingly petty behaviour. Meanwhile, one girl (case file 9673), was transferred for attempting to set her bed on fire as an act of resistance in the home.

had dominated the earlier half of the century made the acquisition of material possessions more popular and accepted among the affluent middle classes.\textsuperscript{368} In particular, shifting Christian ideals shaped Victorian ideologies of domesticity and thus, the material culture of the home became an increasingly common facet for the display of wealth, status and taste.

In order to reconcile displays of material wealth with Christian values of self-denial and austerity, material goods that decorated the home were rapidly imbued with moral characteristics.\textsuperscript{369} The acquisition of moralising material goods and divinity became to some extent synchronous, and as Cohen highlights, became a matter of urgent religious concern regarding the most appropriate ways in which material possessions and home interiors might be constructed and perceived as moralising. These changing Christian ideals shaped the ideology of WSS home environments, and were reflected in their outward appearance as well as interior conditions.

The desire to create beautiful interiors within WSS homes was synonymous with providing inmates with a moralising environment. One of the institution’s Honorary Secretaries proclaimed that the beauty and comfort of the institution’s material culture could infer moral values:

\begin{quote}
…it is not possible to surround these poor children with too much refinement and beauty. We have terrible arrears to make up to them, terrible associations to eradicate, terrible notions to explode; in short, we have to find them not an institution, but a home; and, say I, the sweeter the better!\textsuperscript{370}
\end{quote}

The statement offers a telling narrative of WSS attitudes and assumptions regarding inmates’ familial backgrounds. The Society believed that many of their inmates had come from inadequate homes, where children’s basic needs were not met, either in material or emotional terms. Contemporary narratives about children’s welfare demonstrates the common belief that inadequate material and emotional care of children within working-class families were linked; institutional staff believed that the homes of poorer classes were generally

\textsuperscript{369} Ibid., pp. 1–31.
\textsuperscript{370} ‘Correspondence’, \textit{Our Waifs and Strays} (April, 1888), p. 12.
perceived to be squalid sites in which immorality and moral apathy was fostered.\footnote{See Livesey, ‘Reading for Character’, pp. 43–67; Cuming, “‘Home is home be it never so homely’”, pp. 371–376; Davin, Growing Up Poor, pp. 45–52.}

By creating beautiful and comfortable environments, institutional staff believed they could alleviate and compensate for children’s perceived misery whilst also facilitating their moral development. The beautiful home therefore, could have a civilising effect on inmates and elevate humanity.\footnote{For ‘missionary aestheticism’ – that is the power of the rhetoric of aestheticism and manifestations of aesthetic style as a remedy for the urban degradation associated with the working-classes – see, Diana Maltz, British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes, 1870–1900: Beauty for the People (Basingstoke, 2006), pp. 1–41.} As Diana Maltz illustrates, reformers such as Octavia Hill and Jane Nassau Senior, believed in Ruskin’s conviction that ‘gifts of beauty and culture’ could remedy the immorality, squalor and deprivation of the poor and working classes through their spiritual elevation.\footnote{Maltz, British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes, pp. 1–2.} The institution could also be a site of comfort. In ‘eradicating’ children’s associations with problematic family members, a well-chosen décor and material culture for these sites could successfully alleviate anxiety, fright and uneasiness that inmates felt being separated from relatives and transported to the unfamiliar institutional home.\footnote{‘The Home Beautiful’, Our Waifs and Strays (February, 1908), p. 275.}

So how then, was the institutional environment constructed in material terms? The WSS framed their efforts to create a sense of homeliness in contrast to other institutional spaces. In particular, the Society rebuffed Poor Law institutions as ‘monotonous and chilling in its all-pervading drab and whitewash’: sites that were achieved by ‘the maximum of cheapness and the minimum of trouble’. Instead, the WSS demanded their residential homes be filled with ‘colour, glee, and the possibility of home-life and instincts’.\footnote{‘News and Views’, Our Waifs and Strays (June, 1887), p. 5.} Such statements indicate the Society’s promotion of their space as superior home environments over the meagre and elementary shelter and material needs that other institutions offered inhabitants. Another article demanded that time, care and effort ought be spent over small details of interior material culture in order to provide relief from the puritanical surroundings of other institutions:
Do put a dash of pink into the distemper–pail; do at least keep an open mind as to the relative cheeriness of a bright bed rug; do split up the acreage of bare walls with here and there a text and a picture...

Colourful material culture alongside small ornamentation, placed in the institution in order to both civilise as well as elicit the pleasure or appreciation of inhabitants was positioned in stark contrast to the perceived drabness and apathy of other institutions, as well as children’s familial homes, which were understood to be the antithesis of home to social reformers. In addition, decorative aspects including vases filled with handpicked flowers and other beautiful glass and china ornaments were considered necessary additions to the institutional space to ensure a degree of beauty and homeliness.

Several photographs depict the interior spaces of WSS institutional homes and provide insight into the ways in which WSS ideals were physically constructed within these environments. Many of these photographs, although not all, were published in the institution’s monthly magazines to showcase the Society’s domestic ideal to subscribers, as well as their aspirations and intentions in childcare provision. A photograph of the Bradstock Lockett dormitory for disabled girls depicts a number of inmates sitting amongst the neatly made beds (figure 9).

Numerous windows allowed a bright and airy feel to the room, and electric or gas lighting would have provided further light during the darker months. Pictures hung on the far walls, the striped lower wall and patterned bedspreads added interest, colour and individuality to the room. The stove heater in the centre of the room would have ensured some comfort and warmth for inhabitants, and especially for those suffering from ill health while providing a focal point for sociability – as evidenced in the picture.

377 Cuming, “‘Home is home be it never so homely’”, p. 370.
The placement of chairs around the heater and the girls’ choice to use this space for social interaction rather than any other room of the home may position the bedroom as a more private yet shared space in which they felt comfortable. As Frank Trentmann has highlighted in his research on materiality and consumption, the increase of utilities such as running water, as well as heat and lighting meant that the Victorian home increasingly became understood as a locus of comfort.\textsuperscript{379} The utilitarian but comfortable space around the stove heater was most likely invested with social and emotional importance in the institutional home. John Gillis, Julie–Marie Strange and Megan Doolittle, for example, have drawn attention to the importance of the ‘hearth’ as the metaphorical heart of the home. The hearth was commonly where families spent time socialising and the typical place of fathers and the elder members of family, who were often seen as the most powerful individuals of the household.\textsuperscript{380}

In all likelihood too, the dormitory was the only space in the home that the girls considered personal – their own – where their belongings were kept. This was also the space in which intimate moments could occur: expressions of solidarity and compassion between inmates and where friendships could be created. Moreover, since the matron was assigned a separate bedroom, supervision and authority within this room was unlikely to have been constant. However, the layout and design of the home was also likely to have been more specific in its arrangement given its purpose to house disabled inhabitants. It is possible, therefore, that the girls spent more time in the bedroom for ease and comfort, and that the design reflected its social function.

A similar layout was adopted for the dormitory of St Nicholas’ Home for disabled boys, where the placement of the home’s Christmas tree in the dormitory highlights in use by inhabitants as both a private and social space. In terms of furnishing, the Bradstock Lockett dormitory seems to have been comparable to other descriptions of institutional bedrooms. Written accounts of the nature of dormitories in other WSS homes across the country emphasise the use of decoration and colour in furnishing in order to establish a sense of homeliness for residents. Bedrooms in St Agnes’ Home, Yorkshire were described as ‘very neat and tidy’ with ‘little red covered beds and a prettily framed text over each’. This description further implies the relationship between beauty and morality in the home. The text, most likely biblical in nature, worked in conjunction with the prettiness of decoration, which sought to elicit a civilising and spiritually elevating effect in inhabitants.

The Bradstock Lockett bedroom highlights the Society’s attempts to create a sense of homeliness for inmates through interior decoration and provision of basic needs such as warmth, adequate light and ventilation. However, the room also demonstrates the practical concerns of caring for a larger number of children. The wooden floors and tiling around the beds reflect the concern for hygiene and the use of materials that would have been easy to clean. The thin curtains and shutter blinds in the dormitories might have provided some ventilation for children if windows were left ajar during the night. Yet they were neither likely to have provided adequate insulation during colder months nor

381 ‘St Agnes’ Home’, *Our Waifs and Strays* (February, 1893), 18–19.
blocked out light during the summer months when children were sleeping. In addition, wall tiling, wooden floors and the vaulted ceiling, in all likelihood, shaped the room’s acoustic so that small noises were magnified, alerting staff to the possibility of any wayward behaviour.\textsuperscript{382}

The attempt to create a beautiful and comfortable environment is also reflected in a photograph of St Winifred’s Home, Clapham (figure 10). This photograph depicts an inviting sitting room through the doorway, with wallpaper, soft furnishings and carpet all adding some colour to the décor. The ornate sideboard displays a wealth of decorative china and ornaments, which add interest and variation to the room. Similar furnishing styles are visible in the hallway. The classical scene above the mantelpiece helped to communicate the aesthetic and moral values within the home. The neatness of the entrance hall and sitting room suggests a sense of order and decorum governed the appearance of and expectations of behaviour within the home. This sense of order was also used to guide inhabitants’ behaviour within the home. Girls who resided at St Winifred’s were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one and searching for employment, often as domestic servants. The neat and ordered interior of St Winifred’s reflected the formality of the households that many inmates would eventually be employed in, and therefore, helped teach inmates the need for best behaviour, care and respect in these sites.

The environment of the institution, however, appeared to lack ‘homeliness’ and comfort, and it is likely that these aspects were not considered to be so imperative for older inhabitants whose presence in the home was often transient. Such an environment probably intended to reinforce domestic authority for inhabitants who were about to enter service. Drawing on research by Leonore Davidoff and Pam Taylor, Lucy Delap asserts that the authoritative and disciplinary systems employed by working-class mothers over daughters were seen as analogous and complementary to those exerted by mistresses.\textsuperscript{383} In all

\textsuperscript{383} Delap, \textit{Knowing their place}, p. 29. See also, Pam Taylor, ‘Daughters and Mothers – Maids and Mistresses: Domestic Service between the Wars’, in Chas Crichter, Richard Johnson, and John Clark (eds.), \textit{Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory
likelihood, both the environment and interpersonal culture within St Winifred’s paralleled those associated with domestic service.

Two photographs depicting the dining rooms of the Society’s homes further highlight attempts to create homeliness. The study of the arrangement and design of dining rooms in institutional homes is of particular importance since this space was likely to be one of the very few in the household where all inhabitants gathered, occupying and negotiating space in relation to co-residents and carers. In this sense, the dining room in many of the institutional homes was likely to have been understood as the core of the household space. The photographs demonstrate the variation of spatial arrangement and furnishing within the institutional homes, which were likely to have been shaped by the size of the home and the need to manage its population.

A photograph taken in the Audenshaw Home depicts a small dining room packed with inhabitants portraying a scene of cosy domesticity and informality (figure 11). A man standing next to the window appears to be a vicar, and suggests that teatime was a time for special guests and added moral meaning.

Children and staff are seated together around the table, in close proximity to each other, with one young child sitting on another diner’s knee, suggesting some intimacy and fondness. The Society’s deliberate choice of using tablecloths, which involved more effort and difficulty than the cleaning of plain table surfaces, may suggest that these items served as visible symbols of the Society’s attitudes regarding domestic furnishing and homeliness. Tablecloths gave a degree of formality to the occasion of dining, as well as physically symbolising social status: the tablecloth, a common feature in the middle-class home, was also a fundamental sign of working-class respectability too.\(^{384}\) As a domestic object, table linen also suggests standards of neatness and good manners were important values to be learnt within the home. The effort invested in keeping the linen fine and white would have served as a marker of the homes’ standards of cleanliness.

Tablecloths’ practical function to protect table surfaces from heat, spillages, scratches and other damage, highlights a concern with domestic economy. Furthermore, the tablecloths define the space by illuminating the domestic activities that took place in these sites. It is unlikely that these rooms were used for many other activities, although a bookshelf in St Mary’s dining hall may indicate that children used the room as a quiet place to read (figure 12). Tablecloths also indicate that specific dining rituals were attached to mealtimes within the homes. It is likely that children may have been responsible for the routines of dressing and resetting table linen, as well as laying the tables with cutlery and perhaps napkins.

In her research on fatherhood and furniture, Strange argues that rituals associated with arranging the table in working-class homes centred on creating time and space for family togetherness, where fondness and interest in children could be articulated over teatime. In addition, communication and other inter–personal exchanges over the dinner table during mealtimes were likely to have brought family members closer together as a unit.\(^{385}\) It is possible that such meanings were invested in the event of dining together as a household within WSS institutional homes. Importantly too, the Society probably considered that

\(^{384}\) Ross, *Love and Toil*, p. 68.

these rituals taught children responsibility, order, tidiness and cleanliness, but also values of formality, sociability and etiquette associated with dining. Teaching children how to lay the table, in all probability, helped to prepare them in their training for domestic service.

Meanwhile, the dining room of St Mary’s Home in Cheam reveals a much more formal space than the Audenshaw dining room, emphasised by its neatness and order (figure 12). The room is much bigger, reflecting the greater number of inhabitants in the home, which by the 1920s was approximately fifty girls. The design of the dining room appears to be much more utilitarian given the larger size of the home. Whilst the tiled floor adds a decorative element and interest to the room, it is likely that tiling was chosen for hygienic reasons, as it was relatively easy to clean. Furthermore, the tiling would have magnified the acoustic in the room, and it may have been likely that talking was prohibited during mealtimes, or rules implemented about levels of noise within the room. The blinds on only the lower part of the window, allow for enough light to enter
the room, but also provide privacy to the room. They may also have prevented children from being distracted during mealtimes.

The clock on the wall suggests that feeding fifty children was regimented and subject to a strict timeframe, overseen by the matrons of the home, who were likely to have been seated authoritatively in the middle of the room on the smaller table. Chairs on both sides of the table would have allowed for the supervision of girls in all directions of the room, and the table’s placement by the fireplace also indicates the staff assumed the most comfortable positions in the room. Despite the more practical furnishing style of the room, vases of flowers located on every dining table added a touch of beauty to the room, as did the ornaments and decoration just visible around the fireplace.

![Dining Room, St Mary’s Home for Girls, c. 1915](From HLR archive)

**FIGURE 12. St Mary’s Home for Girls, Dining Room, c. 1915**

*From HLR archive*

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**Material goods in the home**

The Society’s ideal of homeliness was also constituted through a range of personal and communal material objects placed within the home. Inventories of household items, decorative furnishings and other material objects indicate that a variety of items were gifted to the homes from WSS benefactors. These donations ranged from children’s most basic material needs such as clothing, food and bedding, to other items including musical instruments, library collections and toys that sought to provide pleasure and elevate the morals of
children. Patronage complicates the interpretation of the Society’s ideals of the home and construction of homeliness. The significant role of gifts within WSS home furnishing practices raises questions about how to identify and interpret institutional notions of comfort and beauty, and how these gifts shaped the construction of homeliness in these spaces.

Moreover, donations diminished the institution’s role as authoritative agent in the reproduction of their domestic ideals in practice to some extent. Donated items that WSS did not like or approve of could be translated into currency, by selling on what did not suit the homes. It is probable, however, that at times, the Society had little control over the items placed in the homes. In establishing a home, the Society must have sometimes had to accept less desirable items to be used, before replacing them when they could. Yet, in publicising the interiors of the homes through text and photography, the Society established an aesthetic standard so that donors would have some knowledge about the types and quality of items to give.

It is also important to consider the motivation of donors, trends and etiquette in gift giving. Donation records confirm a trend in gift giving that centred on the provision of the most basic needs for children, including bedding, food and clothing. The donation records for 1890 (figure 13) highlight the popularity of these gifts among donors. It is probable that most patrons understood these items to be the most vital to children’s immediate wellbeing. Given institutional rhetoric about the backgrounds of children admitted to welfare institutions, it is also likely that these items were perceived to be the objects that many children had lacked prior to their admission. These gifts were also relatively easy to give, and unlikely to be considered superfluous by the Society, which allowed donors to engage with the charitable mission to provide for children in a simple, personal and constructive way. The institution’s public fundraising literature further shaped the types of gifts received: books, toys, flowers and gardening tools were the most commonly donated goods following the provision of children’s basic material needs. Monthly magazines promoted these items as possessing the highest value, in terms of educational, emotional and moral benefits to children’s development.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item donated</th>
<th>Number of donations</th>
<th>Other details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Clothing</td>
<td>1,694</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables/fruit</td>
<td>500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toys/dolls/crafts/hobbies</td>
<td>230</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cakes/Sweets/biscuits</td>
<td>139</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other food</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers/gardening tools</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat/fish</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedding</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports equipment</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft furnishings</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinks</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing for individual child</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material/fabric</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boots/shoes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures</td>
<td>22</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crockery/kitchen utensils</td>
<td>15</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furniture</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Medical equipment</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical equipment</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Decorative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Photograph of children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 13. Table of donations to the WSS during 1890.\(^{386}\)

\(^{386}\) These figures are approximate but give some indication of trends in donating. No records exist that record the overall number of donations received by the Society, since many donors gave directly to local homes. These figures have been calculated from the acknowledgements section of each monthly issues of *Our Waifs and Strays* during 1890. In all probability, these donors were included in the acknowledgements section because
The WSS’s attempt to influence the types of donations given to the Society was explicit in fundraising literature. Sections in their magazine entitled ‘Our Children’s Bookshelf’ helped the Society to establish library collections within the homes. Such articles allowed WSS homes to request patrons to send specific books that institutional staff had identified to be both useful in training and enjoyable to inmates. These requests were usually accompanied by an explanation of the benefits children would gain. One book was described to ‘…pleasantly inculcate sympathy and wisdom in helping others’, whilst another book helped train the virtue and success of its reader.  

A list of twenty titles appealed for during 1886 highlights the extent to which these books were considered important in terms of their moralising and educational nature. Half of the titles were praised for their moral benefits; two books were religious in nature, whilst the remaining eight were deemed educational. Three of these books were published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. Educational books included songbooks and books of sheet music, historical books on Charles Dickens and General Gordon. One colouring-in book for very young inmates might have provided some amusement, but at the very least, helped with their educational development, teaching them to colour in neatly.  

Whilst many of the books donated to the homes would have served as additions to the communal libraries, the Society requested other books to add to inmates’ personal possessions. In particular, the Society requested books for the purpose of their dedication as Home Prizes to inmates in annual prize-giving events and the reward of good behaviour. These books, and prize-giving events, sought to function as a means for the Society to train children to display good conduct in the homes. The Society, in all probability, hoped that these books and other prizes might be valued and cherished by children, both on their own and as a reflection of their good behaviour.

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388 ‘Our Children’s Bookshelf’, *Our Waifs and Strays*, (June, 1886), p. 3. This data has been collated from: ‘Our Children’s Bookshelf’, *Our Waifs and Strays* (June, 1886), p. 3; (July, 1886), p. 12; (August, 1886), pp. 7–8; and (October, 1886), p. 8.
receipt and even for long after children had left the institution. Such gifts were likely to have functioned to enhance children’s sense of home and belonging within the institution. Appeals for specific literature highlights the Society’s agency over donated goods. They also demonstrate their domestic authority over the children in their care, with literature functioning as a means of religious and social training. The doctrinal value embedded in such literature was likely to have appealed to donors who hoped that their gifts would exert a civilising influence over inmates.

The Society also shaped the material culture of their homes by advertising for donations for less common gifts in their monthly magazines. These gifts included larger and more expensive items including beds, sewing machines, perambulators for babies, and musical instruments including pianos. A request for a new wringing and mangling machine was placed in the magazine in June 1886 for the Mildenhall Home. The table of acknowledgements of gifts received during 1886 above, however, does not indicate whether this gift was donated to the WSS. Although Christmas trees became annual gifts to each home, the Society often placed adverts in their magazines in the weeks preceding Christmas to remind local communities and supporters to become involved in charitable enterprise at this important time of the Christian year. The December 1885 issue appealed for the donation of a Christmas tree for a home in the Lichfield Diocese. The institution’s monthly magazine thus played an important role in helping the WSS to strategically influence the material construction of their homes by directing donors to give the items that were most needed.

Beyond donors’ immediate motivation to support apparently vulnerable children, the status and recognition associated with being a patron significantly shaped gift–giving trends. As such, the institution ensured that an appropriate

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390 See ‘List of Gifts Received at the Homes’, Our Waifs and Strays (December, 1894), p. 382.
391 ‘News and Views’, Our Waifs and Strays (June, 1886), p. 5.
393 There is a vast literature on philanthropy, fundraising and patronage. See, Peter Shapely, Charity and power in Victorian Manchester (Manchester 2000); Frank Prochaska, The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain (London, 1988); Himmelfarb, Poverty and Compassion; Anne Borsay, ‘Visitors and residents: the dynamics of charity in eighteenth–century Bath’, Journal of Tourism History, 4 (2012),
etiquette of thanking donors was implemented, which further directed the types and frequency of the donations they received. Lists of gifts received at the homes were published as monthly features as a means of acknowledging and thanking donors in a public forum. More detailed expressions of gratitude for larger gifts also became regular features in the magazine. Such acknowledgement, in all likelihood, encouraged a spirit of competition amongst wealthier donors to increase their commitment to provide even greater gifts. This appreciation in published form helped to accredit donors with a mark of respectability and confirmed their status as exemplary models of Christian benevolence.

Communal possessions helped to cement the institutional household together. Communal belongings such as musical instruments or collections of books allowed children to socialise together and most likely taught them values of sharing, loaning and swapping or exchanging goods. In all likelihood, it was these practices that helped to enhance a sense of community, friendship and other interpersonal bonds in the homes. Personal possessions within the home had a very different function and helped inmates cultivate individual identity. The Society stated it was ‘a great benefit, as well as a pleasure to a child, to have clothes that are his own and not a loan to him from the Home’. Beyond a range of clothing acquired whilst in the homes which will be explored in the next chapter, common personal possessions included toys, books, workboxes and other play items that were given to children from WSS staff, donors, and probably relatives in many cases.

Personal possessions were crucial to teaching and regulating children’s morality and behaviour. The Society stated that ‘the want of personal possessions…has been known to lead to dishonesty amongst workhouse children when they have gone out to service’. The Society argued that these children were not accustomed to recognising or appreciating the value of personal possessions, having lacked their own, stating they ‘fail to see that the mistress’ things do not

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394 These features, entitled ‘List of Gifts’ or ‘Thanks’, appear in every issue of the monthly magazine.


396 ‘Naked and ye clothed me’, Our Waifs and Strays (March 1887), p. 2.

397 The case file sample suggests that some relatives sent children presents on special occasions whilst in the homes, but the nature of the gift was not usually recorded.
belong to them, and so petty thefts become their first step on the road to ruin." 398 Personal belongings had the capacity to teach children to respect their own belongings as well as the property of others.

Two photographs of children with their toys demonstrate the Society’s ideals about the didactic nature of toys in reinforcing gendered roles. One girl posing with a doll emphasised the expectation for girls to assume a caring and motherly role (figure 14). Meanwhile, a photograph of a boy with tin soldiers evoked notions of ideal masculinity and citizenship (figure 15). Both children were photographed in their best dress, most likely for the images’ use in public-facing institutional literature, in formal pose, presenting their toys and looking directly at the camera as if to communicate pride in their possessions.

Other photographs that served as home portraits depict inmates posing with their toys and dolls, suggesting the high value both children and the institution placed on these personal possessions in the home (figure 16). Some literature confirms the value of these items in the homes: girls at Roundhill Lodge, Kettering were given individual lockers in which to keep such items. 399 Children’s collection of toys and other personal belongings could also be competitive in nature, and had the potential to elicit jealousy, dishonesty or spiteful behaviour between residents. Toys could also be used instructively to teach children appropriate behaviour and respect. Hamlett draws attention to the practice of confiscating dolls as punishments. 400

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398 ‘Naked and ye clothed me’, Our Waifs and Strays (March 1887), p. 2.
400 Hamlett, Material Relations, p. 127.
FIGURE 14. Girl with china doll, c. 1890
From HLR archive

FIGURE 15. Boy with tin soldiers, Worsley Home, c. 1916
From HLR archive
Domestic authority in the institution

Authority indicated the boundaries of ‘home’ and shaped the ways in which inhabitants experienced both the physical environment of the institution and social relationships within these spaces. First, the institution was shaped by nineteenth-century notions of the home as a private haven dislocated from the public world. This ideal was reflected in physical terms in WSS institutions. Photographs of institutional exteriors depict the use of fencing and other barriers that aimed to provide a sense of privacy to the homes.

The fences and gates surrounding Knebworth Cottage, Lee Cottage and Prospect Homes may be read as expressions of the Society’s authority over the intersections between public and private worlds (figures 17–19). The trees and mature gardens in the Rose Cottage Home further reinforce the barriers between the private home and outside life (figure 20). Other homes, such as Scholfield home, possessed large grounds that further separated them from neighbouring communities (figure 21). Fencing and similar barriers, however, tended not to be high enough to be considered imposing or unwelcoming to outsiders. Yet, fencing, gates and other means of designating privacy still impeded, policed and

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restricted unwelcome or unsolicited visitors to the home as well as those inhabitants who desired to leave the institution.

These barriers were likely to have been understood as authoritative boundaries by the inhabitants of the home. They clearly marked the threshold of the home and its ground. Inmates’ entry to the outside world and the community would have been granted only by permission and subject to supervision by staff members. Authority was thus circumscribed in physical terms in order to keep inmates within the confines of the home, ensuring their safety, security and importantly, control. Boundaries limited children’s freedom of movement through the visible designation of the spaces in which they could move, work and play. The likelihood that entrances to the home were kept locked further diminished children’s agency and autonomy. These physical devices emphasised children’s position as institutional inmates, whilst staff members’ control over inmates’ movement between public and private world emphasised their authoritative role over inhabitants. Importantly too, these boundaries reinforced inmates’ dependence on home staff, by means of requiring permission to leave the institution.

FIGURE 17. Knebworth Home for Boys, c. 1894

*From HLR archive*
FIGURE 18. Lee cottage Home for Girls, c. 1888  
*From HLR archive*

FIGURE 19. Prospect Home Lodge, Reading, c. 1905  
*From HLR archive*
FIGURE 20. Rose Cottage, Dickleburgh, c. 1900

From HLR archive

FIGURE 21. Scholfield Home for Girls, Wavertree, 1897

From HLR archive
That boundaries were used to establish inmates’ engagement with spaces beyond the institution as well as manage the inmate population, did not mean that the idea of home and ‘homeliness’ was diminished. Instead, such boundaries and other means of designating space within and outside the institution functioned as markers of domestic authority, rather than the construction of a totalising institution. Importantly too, boundaries and other designated space could enhance inhabitants’ sense of home by strengthening a sense of group membership, identity and responsibility within the home.

As Hamlett suggests, it is essential to note that inhabitants’ relationships with designated space and boundaries within the home, in all likelihood, fluctuated. She argues that division and use of rooms did not intend to secure the privacy of the isolated individual, but instead, spatial division was used to negotiate relationships between family members and to create and reinforce specific hierarchies and roles within the household.\footnote{Hamlett, \textit{Material Relations}, pp. 40–41.} Whilst rules were designed to control movement within the home, it is unlikely that they restricted engagement with specific spaces at all times. Rather, designated space and rules about inhabitants’ movement and engagement with home environments could regularly be contravened when circumstance dictated. With permission, children could enter spaces that were ordinarily out of bounds, or move beyond the home when going to and from the local school.

The use of boundaries that designated ‘acceptable’ spaces reflected the norms of childhood in middle–class homes. Hamlett for example, draws attention to bounded children’s spaces such as the nursery, schoolroom, and garden in middle-class homes.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 126, 128–136.} Importantly too, this division between adult and child spaces of the home meant that the special nature of children’s time spent with other family members and outside the confines of these spaces was accentuated and invested with special meaning. Whilst welfare reformers criticised working-class parents of not supervising their children, Anna Davin’s research also highlights that working–class children were also subject to boundaries that regulated their movements and behaviour. Working-class children were subject to the communal rule of the street and of many other
mothers that sought to ensure their safety by policing their behaviour and their engagement with spaces beyond the home.405

Other distinct spaces within the institution, such as separate sitting rooms and bedrooms for staff members, further enforced authority and social hierarchy. A photograph of the matron Mrs. Bailey in her sitting room in St Andrew’s Home in Derbyshire highlights authoritative boundaries and hierarchies within the homes (figure 22). The opulence of the curtain and carpet fabrics, complemented by the delicate, feminine and ornate furniture gives the room an air of luxury and designates its private use by the head of the house. Interior decoration and material items within the room reflected both the gender and the Society’s aspirations for the individuals that used the space.

The richer interior of the sitting room also distinguishes its function from the utilitarian communal areas of the institution inhabited by inmates. As chapter one demonstrated, many of the Society’s matrons and masters were likely to have been respectable working-class individuals who, like the children inhabiting the homes, were unlikely to have viewed these spaces as familiar or customarily ‘homely’ in their decoration. Instead, these spaces were aspirational in nature for the inhabitants that used them on a daily basis. It is probable that the Society hoped that these spaces would also help to elevate the status of staff members according to their ideals of home. The appearance of the matron in the photograph in best dress with her dog, a common and potent symbol of middle-class distinction and status, helped the Society to communicate their ideals of staff members’ elevated status and respectability in the homes to a public audience.406

The interior furnishing of the room also probably reflected its use by the matron to meet external visitors, including WSS patrons and supporters. As such, the room functioned as an important vehicle for communicating the Society’s homely ideals to a range of visitors interested in the Society’s work. It is difficult to determine how far external visitors would have been granted access to the other more utilitarian spaces of the home that children inhabited. Moreover, it is

405 Davin, Growing up Poor, pp. 57–74.
possible that children’s relatives were ushered into the room when visiting the home. The interior decoration of the space might have intended to reassure relatives of the Society’s material provision for children. The room most likely sought to convince relatives that children were best left in the Society’s care, given that relatives were unlikely to have been able to provide such a comfortable site for children. Since very little evidence survives that highlights the regulations and logistics for visiting days, it is similarly difficult to determine how far relatives were familiar with the other spaces in the household. It is probable that visitation took place in the communal areas of the house, such as dining rooms and sitting rooms, where staff might have been able to exert their presence or even supervise such events.

![Figure 22. Mrs. Bailey and her dog, c. 1901](From HLR archive)

The Society’s fundraising literature informed readers that children were not excluded from these sites in the homes. Accounts state that inmates often retired to the matron’s sitting room in the evening for quiet activities such as needlework or reading.\(^\text{407}\) Whilst these rooms claimed titles such as ‘matron’s sitting room’, which reinforced a sense of division, children’s presence in these spaces flouted the conventions attached to their intended use and offered the

opportunity for the socialisation of inmates and staff. However, children’s access by invitation to enter these rooms as well as the likelihood of the matron’s continued presence and supervision over children indicates that domestic authority, hierarchy and division underpinned inmates’ relationship with these spaces. Permission to enter the rooms, in all probability, was granted only according to the display of appropriate behaviour, and thus emphasises the boundaries of agency and authority in physical terms within the home.

Authority was also established in the daily life in the homes through strict schedules of chores, education, and leisure, as the Marylebone Home timetable demonstrates (figure 23). The timetable appears to be rigid and regimented in structure, and suggests little time for flexibility around prescribed time. The timetable presents some insight into the intended outcomes of structured time and routines within the homes, as well as the objective to effectively manage household populations. The timetables also cover all aspects of daily life, including training, education, religion, household chores, exercise and play. These activities suggested that a work ethic was instilled in children during every hour of the day, with little deviation from these routines. The Dulwich Home for Girls, operated a similar timetable including early rising, assisting the matron in light housework duties before school and leisure time after school in the play yard to the rear of the home. Meanwhile, fundraising literature indicated that during school holidays, children helped around the home, and leisure activities and holidays were organised by home staff, which will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

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408 Tosh, *A Man’s Place*, p. 105. Tosh’s research on socialisation in public schools highlights that time spent in the company of teachers could result in some boys viewing them as surrogate parents.

409 For more about how the state and other such institutions wielded domestic power as substitute parents of children, see Delap, Griffin and Wills, *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800*.

410 ‘Our Receiving Houses’, *Our Waifs and Strays* (October, 1882), p. 3.
The timetables suggest that children’s days were lengthy, given their early rising and late bed times. Furthermore, the expectation to participate in housework at various intervals throughout the day added a more strenuous element to their daily labour. In many homes, however, division of household chores reflected inmates’ ages with younger children undertaking very light duties whilst elder inmates were expected to assist the matron more comprehensively.\footnote{‘Kensington Training School for Girls’, \textit{Our Waifs and Strays} (November, 1902), pp. 398–399.} At Clarendon House only children over the age of ten were expected complete chores whilst younger inmates were taken for a walk.\footnote{‘Clarendon Home House for Girls’, \textit{Our Waifs and Strays} (October, 1894), pp. 349–351.} Younger children also had shorter days: infants at the Kensington Home retired to their bedrooms at 6.20 pm.\footnote{‘Kensington Training Home for Girls’, pp. 398–399.}
Timetables helped the institution to exert authority over inmates, establish easily recognisable patterns of what was considered appropriate behaviour, and control movement within and beyond the home. Institutional schedules and the structure of time did not diverge entirely from the expectations of work within the working-class family home. As Anna Davin and Ellen Ross demonstrate, many working-class children were expected to make important contributions to the home and household economy, taking on household chores, caring for siblings and working part-time jobs to supplement family income. Authority was also reinforced through the denial of normal daily patterns of life including the freedom to perform various activities when inhabitants wished to do so. Freedom to visit family and friends and similarly for relatives to visit the home was restricted to certain days. Inmates’ privacy and time spent alone, unaccompanied and unsupervised, was likely to have been minimal. Furthermore, playtime and social interaction between residents was limited and at the end of the day when children’s energy was probably waning. It is possible that the Society hoped that this routine might tire inmates out before going to bed and consequently keep disruptive behaviour at bedtime at a minimum.

Yet the explanation that followed the Marylebone Home’s timetable suggests that timetables had less influence over home life than appeared. Instead, the statement suggests that timetables presented a basic idea of the structure of daily living within WSS homes, but that they did little to diminish a sense of natural home life. The statement positions home life as more important to children’s development than imposed routines, which failed to incorporate other facets of daily living, such as household or ‘family’ time spent together. As such, time in WSS homes intended to create a sense of home over the institution. This caveat implies that there was some flexibility in how time was spent within the institutional home, as well as the possibility to deviate from structure. Moreover, it was likely that daily routines reflected the management and caring styles of matrons and masters in the homes, as well as according to the immediate needs of inhabitants, and thus the home life of inmates could vary in each WSS home.

Institutional rules and regulations also centred on the display of good behaviour and recognition of authority and order. The staff handbook

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414 Davin, Growing up Poor, pp. 157–199; Ross, Love and Toil, pp. 148–162.
demonstrates that a standardised system of punishment was implemented for disruptive children across all homes (figure 24). Punishment was considered a primary element in children’s discipline and the institution encouraged staff to make inmates aware of expectations of conduct by displaying institutional rules conspicuously in the homes.

Punishments shall consist of:—

(a) Forfeiture of rewards and privileges, or degradation from rank previously attained by good conduct.
(b) Reduction in quality or quantity of food.
(c) Confinement in a light room or cell.
(d) Moderate personal correction and chastisement.


Punishments within boys’ homes were categorised according to severity of the offence. The WSS, however, recommended that inmates’ confinement, personal correction and chastisement be resorted to only in serious cases. Yet, no further indication is given regarding what constituted a serious offence and consequently, inmates’ experience of punishment throughout the residential homes most likely varied considerably and according to the individual personalities of staff members. Moreover, none of the rules were to be applied to children under six years of age. Punishment was also gender–specific: physical punishment was not incorporated into regimes in girls’ homes but followed similar conventions to boys’ punishments in all other aspects.⁴¹⁵

Jacob Middleton’s research on the corporal punishment of children suggests that this type of discipline in WSS homes was not uncommon. He argues that although attitudes to corporal punishment in schools were changing, with more parents objecting to perceived cruel and arbitrary discipline in schools, it was retained and tolerated in schools as a common, natural part of childhood. Until the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, despite these changing attitudes about the delegation of parents’ authority, boys in particular, were subject to corporal punishment in schools, while girls less

frequently encountered corporal punishment, and were often treated with greater leniency.\textsuperscript{416} It appears that, in the policies at the very least, the WSS believed corporal punishment was an integral part of their child rearing duties in the institution.

Histories of inmates’ experiences of the institution have often focussed on the discipline and punishment of children, which has contributed to understandings of the welfare institution as a harsh, isolating and uncaring place.\textsuperscript{417} In many other institutions, research has suggested that inmates’ treatment at the hands of institutional officials was draconian, unnecessarily severe and at times, children were victims of deliberate abuse.\textsuperscript{418} Nevertheless, research has often focussed on the harsh aspects of control, whilst overlooking more nuanced methods of discipline. In WSS institutions staff were encouraged to implement and favour a ‘system of rewards and encouragement’ to maintain discipline and good behaviour.\textsuperscript{419} The institution expected staff members to provide guidance and supportive influence over children and their conduct. These methods imitated common disciplinary procedures implemented beyond the institutions, in schools and in private homes. Punishment was considered a last resort for continued bad behaviour or very serious offences.

In practice therefore, the use of corporal punishment only as a last resort within WSS homes, mirrors broader shifts in attitudes during the late nineteenth century, which tended to position corporal punishment as unnecessarily brutal in schools and other institutions. Moreover, the display of rules and punishments prominently within the homes might have adequately deterred some disruptive activities of inhabitants who threatened the established order and authority within the home. In addition, it is possible that with the establishment of more affective and intimate relationships between children and their carers, especially in smaller homes, that corporal punishment was abandoned in favour of less formal and more forgiving forms discipline and direction.

\textsuperscript{417} For reformation and training of children, see Murdoch, \textit{Imagined Orphans}, pp. 120–142.
\textsuperscript{419} \textit{Handbook for Workers, Part II}, p. 10.
Regulation of children’s conduct appears to have been based on merit systems that rewarded good behaviour in the first instance. The Marylebone Girls Home generated points for each girl for housework duties, tidiness and punctuality. Girls were given scores each week and inmates who had not lost any marks during the week would be awarded a star and given a treat.\textsuperscript{420} Annual prize–giving events at the homes also rewarded inmates’ conduct. An inmate at The Cold Ash Home was awarded a prize for being the ‘best–tempered and most unselfish’.\textsuperscript{421}

Although systems of rewards and privileges can be understood as a more interpersonal, affective and nurturing system of encouraging and eliciting good behaviour, it is important to acknowledge that these systems could also be used by staff members inconsistently and unfairly. The frequent rewarding of the same inmates could have been interpreted as favouritism by other co-residents, thereby creating jealousy, conflict and isolation within a home. Whilst good behaviour was encouraged through a system of rewards in most homes, punishment records highlight that the display of bad behaviour was usually corrected by the deprivation of rewards and treats, instead of harsher methods of castigation. Punishment records indicate that provision of basic foods including bread, water and gruel were given in place of the usual cooked dinner.\textsuperscript{422} Meanwhile, these records and institutional literature indicates that some inmates were punished by being sent to bed without pudding.\textsuperscript{423}

As chapter one demonstrated, another common method of resolving bad behaviour was the transferral of inmates to other homes. The Society believed that disruptive inmates would be brought under control through the discipline, influence and guidance from unfamiliar staff members.\textsuperscript{424} In addition, physical labour and industrial training, such as laundry work, was implemented in some of the Society’s industrial homes as a disciplinary measure for unruly inmates. These regimes in WSS homes were similar to those implemented within state-

\textsuperscript{420} ‘Notes from the Homes’ \textit{Our Waifs and Strays} (January, 1893), pp. 8–9 and ‘Notes from the Homes’, \textit{Our Waifs and Strays} (April, 1886), pp. 2, 6.
\textsuperscript{421} ‘Notes from the Homes, \textit{Our Waifs and Strays} (March, 1890), p. 2.
\textsuperscript{422} Punishment book, Hunstanton Home, 1897–1899.
\textsuperscript{424} See case file 175,’ Letter from Fareham Home’, 25/7/1887.
funded industrial schools, in which strict discipline and sometime brutality was a common feature of daily life, especially for girls, as some historians have emphasised. These regimes were parallel to a number of processes adopted in other reformatories, such as those for fallen or morally deviant women. Meanwhile, Marianne Moore argues that some reformatory and industrial school managers, like WSS officials, were sympathetic to the perceived helpless condition of children in industrial schools. Instead, Moore asserts that industrial school officials acknowledged their duty to protect rather than control inmates, and recognised the ‘advantages of family life’ over the strict disciplinary regimes and confinement usually associated with the industrial school. Expectations associated with physical labour were more demanding, and acknowledged to teach important values such as hard work, punctuality, obedience, and recognition of authority that some inmates were perceived to lack.

**Conclusion**

The study of WSS institutional sites demonstrate the Society’s use of a rhetoric of domesticity in their attempts to construct a stable, natural home life for its welfare dependants. The Society’s conceptualisation of homeliness centred on a number of elements including children’s domestic comfort, achieved through the acquisition of a range of household goods, as well as the longevity of a child’s placement. Their attempts to create a sense of homeliness in the institution

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further demonstrates that institutional officials acknowledged the importance of creating an environment where inhabitants felt at home.

Examination of the material conditions of home sites, as well as the ways in which children were expected to behave within these spaces confirmed that WSS intentions extended beyond merely providing children with shelter and basic material requirements. Not only did the WSS believe that their domestic ideals were fulfilling dependants’ needs for comforting and nurturing environments, but children’s experiences within the ideal home helped teach inmates a range of important morals and skills that were unlikely to have been provided by the environments from which they came.

Meanwhile, domestic authority by means of boundaries and structured daily home-life, helped to ensure the safety and protection of inhabitants, as well as reinforce values of order, responsibility and structure. The chapter argues that domestic authority should not be viewed as the antithesis of homeliness, but instead, an element of home-life that aimed to enhance and cement a sense of togetherness, group membership, and belonging within the institutional homes. The following chapter examines a range of practices beyond daily routines that the Society implemented in order to further enhance inmates’ sense of ‘home’, ‘family’ and belonging. The chapter argues that children’s experiences and training within the institution were not incompatible with pleasure and other forms of care that intended to cultivate children as individuals.
CHAPTER FOUR

Individuality, family time and pleasure in the institution

Studies of institutional welfare provision have often presented the daily life and experiences of inmates as totalising processes. Erving Goffman defined the total institution as a highly regulated environment in which all social arrangements of daily life occur, where inmates are subjected to established routines, formal systems of regulation and authority imposed by an official body. Enforced activities that take place within these sites are usually designed to fulfil specific institutional objectives. Shaped by Goffman’s research, scholars have usually studied institutional experience according to the exercise of authority and processes of subjection and action, discipline and punishment that direct and control the behaviour of inmates.

Yet Crowther’s research on the workhouse has acknowledged the flexible application of institutional regimes and practices, which depended largely on varied economic, regional and social contexts. Scholars have also analysed the strategies that the poor adopted in order to negotiate and plea with those in power to gain the assistance they needed. The second chapter of this thesis contributes further to readings of the nuances and complexities involved in

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429 Goffman, Asylums, p. 17.
430 Ibid.
implementing institutional policy, and the possibility for relatives to negotiate the terms of children’s admission and care. Historians of child welfare provision have emphasised the authority institutions assumed, often contentiously, over children who were either deemed endangered or placed in care temporarily. Children’s segregation from family members and their cultural representation as ‘nobody’s children’ undermined familial ties and ensured the organisation’s assumption of definitive and uncomplicated authority.\(^{434}\) Similarly, policies that prohibited contact with relatives and kept familial identity secret from inmates further highlight the power institutions held over welfare recipients.\(^ {435}\)

Meanwhile, within the institution, studies have focussed on how ideals of reform were underpinned by notions of morality, citizenship, and industriousness. In particular, material environments served to morally regulate and domesticate ‘savage’ children whilst regimes of hard work and discipline could transform ‘street arabs’ into productive citizens.\(^ {436}\) In other residential homes, children were subjected to severe disciplinary regimes, comprising of continuous observation and regulation, a strong religious emphasis, insufficient diets, little education or play, and a complex system of rewards and punishments. These regimes were akin to other types of punitive reformatories, such as those for fallen women and industrial schools.\(^ {437}\) As Abrams argues, such regimes intended to ‘sap the spirit of inmates’ as well as serve the interests of institutional officials who were motivated by a range of ‘economic considerations, imperial ambitions and missionary zeal’.\(^ {438}\)

Beyond the punitive aspects of institutional life, the emotional and social elements associated with inmate care and child rearing have been persistently neglected from historical research. Whilst historians, such as Crowther, have argued that institutional policies were not always as totalising and authoritative as traditionally assumed,\(^ {439}\) scholars have asserted that emotional nurture and

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\(^{437}\) For inmates’ treatment in other institutions see Bartley, *Prostitution*; Mumm, “‘Not Worse than Other Girls’”, pp. 527-46.


\(^{439}\) Crowther, *The English Workhouse System*. See also, Newman ‘To Punish or Protect’, pp. 122–145; Anne Digby, ‘Recent developments in the study of the English poor law’,
individuality were largely absent or wholly inadequate for institutional inmates. Abrams argues, for example, that the strict confinement of children in Quarrier’s Homes prohibited contact with family members. This lack of integration in local communities usually resulted in children’s isolation whilst in care. Furthermore, she suggests that the institution’s inability to provide children with individual attention exacerbated feelings of not belonging and further hampered inmates’ personal development.

This chapter complicates the story of the children’s experiences of residential welfare by analysing the ways in which the WSS promoted key moments: celebrations, children’s treats, and other everyday home customs. These served as a means to create family time and cohesiveness that would foster inmates’ individuality and pleasure. This analysis demonstrates how the Society promoted a set of ideals that intended to recognise inmates as individuals and make children feel valued. These ideals and practices were positioned as a framework for the nurture and emotional development of inmates within the institution.

The chapter, however, does not seek to claim that the WSS was dissimilar to other welfare institutions operating at the time, which were primarily concerned with the reformation of poor children. Nor does it claim that these ideals and practices were very much different to those enacted in other institutions. A strong emphasis on work, education, regulation, spiritual instruction and self-improvement that defined WSS daily life, which will not be examined here, confirms that like other institutional philosophies, WSS ideology centred on notions of children’s reform and training. Yet, inmates’ nurture and emotional wellbeing appear to have been vital, additional elements to the institution’s ideals of reform and training, which have too often been disregarded by historians of institutional care.

WSS ideals of individuality, togetherness and pleasure

Reformist discourse from the mid-nineteenth century on the institutional care of children, acknowledged that inmates needed more than the basic material provision that large workhouses and industrial homes usually offered. As Murdoch demonstrates, reformers such as Jane Nassau Senior, working in the second half of the century, expressed particular concern over the treatment that girls received. Senior argued that large residential homes did not sufficiently care for their social and emotional needs, and instead were often responsible for inmates’ moral corruption and subsequent failures later in life.443 Senior criticised larger institutions for the lack of ‘cherishing care and individual attention’; ‘more mothering’ was needed for girls in institutions, in particular.444 She lamented the difficulty of preventing institutionalism in children – the lethargy and dullness visible in inmates subjected to the monotony of institutional confinement – and stated that vacations, regular outings and other treats would be beneficial to the training and development of inmates.445

The WSS perpetuated Senior’s views, and as analysis in this chapter demonstrates, the Society established a nurturing set of ideals and practices, underpinned by the notion of ‘family’, that aimed to foster pleasure, inmates’ individuality and enhance feelings of self-worth within the institution. The Society criticised larger institutions for failing to provide inmates with an absolute ‘knowledge of the ways of family life’.446 This criticism implicitly positioned the family-like environment in smaller homes, although manufactured, as the ideal model for successful child rearing.447 Another statement in the monthly magazine further promoted ideals that sought to enhance children’s development, stating that “Man doth not live by bread alone” and children, whether rich or poor, need personal kindness and individual sympathy for the development of their nature”.448 Whilst the creation of familial-

443 Murdoch, Imagined Orphans, pp. 54–55. See also chapter 3, pp. 104, 117.
447 For cottage home systems in Poor Law operation see Soanes, “‘The Place was a Home from Home”, pp. 109–124; Murdoch ‘From Barrack Schools to Family Cottages’, p. 147; Driver, ‘Discipline without Frontiers?’, pp. 272–293.
type relationships in the institution was inextricable from aims to morally and economically train children, the statement also suggests their value in helping children to recognise their own value and significance in the wider world. By enhancing children’s self-esteem, the Society’s care would counter the feelings of institutionalism that many reformers observed in inmates.

Ideals that aimed to foster children’s individuality and self-worth in the institution were shaped by the rituals associated with ‘family-time’. As John Gillis has demonstrated, the concept of family time – special times set aside for the socialisation of the family through dining, homecoming, and bedtime – became an increasingly significant aspect of home life embedded in the organisation of middle-class daily life from the 1850s. These ritualised occasions of togetherness for the middle classes were imbued with special meaning at a time where the nuclear family was being torn apart by regimes of work and school. As other historians such as Julie-Marie Strange and Megan Doolittle have argued, it was these rituals of togetherness where family members expressed affection towards each other and where time and space took on added interpersonal significance. Memory and nostalgia also played important parts in the construction and understanding of family time. Gillis argues that these events ‘concentrate time in space’ allowing family present to connect with family past. Daily rituals of family time also help to cement tradition and experience, where participants are linked through a ‘fixed point’ that is ‘undisturbed by the passage of time and generations’. It is these events that provide a sense of belonging and identity – occasions that anchor individuals to the home and family, and that become memories and ‘objects of nostalgia’, which are remembered fondly, and as homely and comforting.

The need to create these rituals and feelings for WSS inmates was even more pressing, given the Society’s perception that many poor children admitted to care had lacked this type of family time and affection. One statement in the Society’s monthly magazine highlights their desire to compensate for the lack of

449 Gillis, A World of Their Own Making, p. 88.
450 Ibid.
452 Gillis, A World of Their Own Making, pp. 93–94.
family affection that many children were perceived to have encountered prior to their admission to the institution:

But where are the loving faces of parents, the venerable forms of an older generation, the kindly sympathy of uncles and aunts, or the fun…which bubbles up among the clustering groups of brothers, sisters, and cousins and seems actually to flood these gatherings where memories and hopes, sympathies and interests, are all in common?⁴⁵³

This statement suggests that the Society’s vision to care for children was through the creation of family time within the homes. In lamenting the absence of what should have been – the loving multi-generation family kinship – the Society implicitly positioned its homes as a contrast. The statement demonstrates the Society’s authority in knowing what inmates were supposedly missing and offers sympathy and recompense.

Meanwhile, given the importance of emotional and social care in the Society’s childcare ideology, several other rituals enacted within the institution formed a set of nurturing practices that sought to foster individuality, self-worth and belonging beyond the biological family. In some cases, symbolic displays of attachment and fondness were central elements to routines of care, whilst in other cases, they became supplementary benefits of childcare practices. Many of these practices centred on the treating of children: through holidays, Christmas presents, birthday presents, parties, and other small events. Other practices implemented in the institution also trained inmates in the importance of nurture, by requiring them to articulate these sentiments themselves. The practice of keeping and caring for pets and other animals in the institution, as well as the act of gardening as both a hobby and a home-chore, also sought to foster greater emotional capacities in children, and provide them with some pleasure in the homes.

Individuality and identity

The Society considered children’s clothing important in providing warmth and comfort but also in communicating individuality, identity and belonging in the wider world. In the nineteenth century, clothing and the condition of attire was central to the making and interpretation of identity, respectability and status.\(^{454}\) Several historians have focussed on how the character of both the rich and the poor could be read through clothing.\(^{455}\) For the Victorians, the physical and the moral were inextricably linked. Mariana Valverde has shown that according to Victorian social science taxonomies, a love of finery in clothing could signal vice, venereal disease and urban decay associated with the fallen woman.\(^{456}\)

Meanwhile, interest and pride in clothing for other groups of society, such as patients in asylums, were understood as indicators of respectability and sense of worth and often encouraged by institutional staff, as Alana Barton demonstrates in her research on the treatment and control of ‘deviant’ women.\(^{457}\) Admission photographs of institutionalised children, although usually staged, provided insight into how status, deservingness, respectability and character of the wearer was assessed through the quality of clothing and how these representations were depicted to a broader public audience.\(^{458}\) The condition, fit, suitability and cleanliness of clothing often marked the boundary between respectable and degraded families.\(^{459}\)

As Rebecca Wynter has argued, clothing was a distinct element of first impressions and could be a significant factor in being admitted to residential

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\(^{458}\) Rose, ‘Raggedness and Respectability in Barnardo’s Archive’, pp. 136–150.

\(^{459}\) Livesey, ‘Reading for Character’, pp. 53, 55.
Within the context of child welfare, institutional staff and social reformers believed that raggedness of clothing signified parents’ lack of resources, or even their fecklessness, to adequately care for their offspring. Clothing retained its significance following inmates’ admission: casting off of personal clothing, bodily cleansing and the provision of institutional attire signified an important physical transformation and the erasure of the inmates’ former sense of self. A number of historians have demonstrated how uniforms became a treatment in institutional care, as well as its function in emphasising and reinforcing social and cultural roles of the wearer.461

Uniforms for a range of institutional residents, including convicts, workhouse residents and mental asylum patients, promoted a sense of order and discipline, as well as the ‘removal’ of identity or denial of individuality of inhabitants. Vivienne Richmond argues that uniforms intended to subdue individuality, and were increasingly used in the nineteenth century to mould and reform characters and to discipline individuals.462 Similarly, Hamlett and Hoskins suggest that for some institutional residents, uniforms had a punitive intention making the wearer easily identifiable for a number of reasons.463 Such uniforms might distinguish the wearer by class, behaviour, illness or convictions, and could function as a visible tool to exclude the wearer from different sects of ‘acceptable’ society. For many, institutional uniforms and other identifiable marking must have been a catalyst for feelings of shame and embarrassment if subjected to public scrutiny.464

Since clothing signified the quality of care that children received, it was of central importance to the WSS as a vehicle to communicating their ideals and

460 Wynter, “‘Good in all respects’”, p. 43.
463 Hamlett and Hoskins, ‘Comfort in Small Things?’, p. 6. Steve Hindle’s research on badging the poor through clothing and other adornments between 1550 and 1750 also demonstrates the discriminatory nature of welfare and the shame associated with dependency and pauperisation across the social scale. Hindle, ‘Dependency, Shame and Belonging’, pp. 6–35.
promoting the quality of their childcare practices. Unlike many other statutory and voluntary institutions, including the workhouse, WSS inmates were not required to wear a uniform. Not all institutions required inmates to wear uniforms, and Richmond suggests that there was increasing opposition of institutional staff and reformers to uniform inmates and patients during the later half of nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, inmates in some institutions were given the opportunity to make small changes to their clothing. Hamlett and Hoskins have demonstrated that some patients in mental asylums were allowed the freedom to express their agency and identity by adding some small adornments to uniforms. In particular, fee-paying private patients were privileged with being able to wear their own clothes or make significant changes to uniforms to differentiate themselves visibly and materially from other inmates. Thus, whilst the WSS practice of rejecting the intentional uniforming of inmates was not unique, few studies have addressed how lack of uniforms or inmates’ ability to control aspects of their dress sought to foster individuality within the children’s welfare context.

The Society believed that uniforms evoked an oppressive, prison-like atmosphere for inhabitants that contradicted their objective to nurture children’s individuality and engage with them on a personal level. In the October 1888 issue of their monthly magazine for supporters, the Society debated the value of children’s uniforms by reprinting the comments of a matron at a girls’ reformatory in Hampstead. This institution, which had no affiliation with the WSS, allowed girls to make small variations in the ornamentation of their uniforms, such as an added ribbon or lace. The matron claimed that this had a most beneficial effect in fostering a feeling of self-respect amongst the girls. While concurring with the matron’s opinion of the value of this practice, the WSS further argued that ‘if a ribbon was thus useful, the entire absence of uniform is a fortiori to be desired’.

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466 Ibid., p. 269.
467 Hamlett and Hoskins, ‘Comfort in Small Things?’, p. 4.
468 Ibid.
Such a feeling underpinned their decision to eliminate uniforms, and the Society further stated that women and girls, in particular, ‘cannot be elevated if you do not dress them pretty well’. The statement suggests the Society’s understanding of the importance of agency, self-fashioning and distinctiveness in dress, which helped to heighten children’s sense of individuality and self-esteem both in the institution and in the wider world. Nevertheless, the statement also perpetuated gender stereotypes that dress mattered and was of particular importance for girls.

Allowing inmates some agency over their dress and appearance was likely to have been a source of comfort for many children in the institution. As Hamlett argues, residential inmates were not often allowed to keep the majority of their personal possessions, particularly if they could be used for harmful or mischievous purposes. The removal of personal items from the owner’s care, combined with the provision of a uniform, could cause upset and distress and in all likelihood reinforced an uncomfortable power imbalance for many inmates. Although little information survives regarding the items that children were allowed to keep within the institution, correspondence suggests that the items relatives sent to children in care were subject to inspection. It is probable that institutional staff confiscated some of these items before they reached the recipient because staff perceived them to be unsuitable. As such, some control over clothing was likely to have compensated for any perceived lack of personal and valued items within the homes.

Children’s attire had important implications for identity beyond the spaces of the Society’s homes. Although uniformity of dress provided an indistinguishable identity for residents within the same home and could prevent feelings of disparity and jealousy amongst co-residents, it also functioned as a marker of difference outside the institution. Uniforms were often the source of ‘public stigmatisation’ of the wearer, especially those that served as recognisable ‘symbolic emblems’ of poverty and dependency, as Beverly Lemire and Steve Hindle have noted. WSS children’s individuality in dress therefore, meant that

470 Ibid.
their movement as welfare-recipients in the wider community when attending
church and school was probably both less explicit and less scrutinised. The lack
of distinct uniform, in all likelihood, allowed children to blend in more easily
within their local communities, although it is probable that there were some
identifiable differences in the range or quality of clothing inmates wore in
comparison to that of other children in the local community. Children’s dress
nevertheless, enabled their participation in societal norms in the wider world.

Appeals and adverts in WSS monthly magazines suggest that donors
provided much of the clothing for each home. In 1887, individual supporters
clothed a total of 260 inmates, and while this relieved some of the financial strain
on institutional resources, the cost of clothing children still amounted to £317 12s
and 8d.473 As Richmond highlights, ladies clothing charities were a common
feature of philanthropic activities in the nineteenth century. Whilst many
charities solicited donations of old and second-hand clothing for the poor,
Richmond states that in more affluent areas, ladies were encouraged to sew new
clothes for the poor.474

The WSS used both methods to obtain clothing for the thousands of
children that passed through their care. In addition, the WSS established schemes
that promoted a more personalised and individual relationship between children
and donors. One scheme allowed supporters to invest in one inmate for any
specified duration of time, by managing and overseeing the provision of their
clothes. This could be done through a combination of financial donations, gifts of
bought or second-hand clothing, or by making clothes for the child. In July 1887,
The North London Collegiate School for Girls sponsored one child in a local
WSS home, and not only paid for the cost of caring for the child, but also agreed
to provide clothing or funds to clothe the child.475 Such schemes helped provide
donors with direct experience of the impact of their gifts on the lives of

406–407; Steve Hindle, ‘Dependency, Shame and Belonging’, Cultural and Social
History, 1 (2004), pp. 6–35. A similar argument is also put forward in John Styles, The
473 ‘Naked and ye clothed me’, Our Waifs and Strays (March, 1887), p. 2.
474 Richmond, Clothing the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England, p. 217.
individual children, as well as their role in helping to foster inmates’ self-esteem and identity.\textsuperscript{476}

Like many other charities, the WSS established strong partnerships with several working parties that provided poor children with a range of new clothing.\textsuperscript{477} In all likelihood, these sewing societies used the same dress patterns and as such, the clothing the Society received was likely to be similar if not the same in style. In addition, while the WSS wished to foster individuality and identity through clothing, the Society dictated the types of attire inmates wore by producing specific guidelines regarding the donation of clothing. The WSS established a basic level of clothing that each child was to possess, which was published in the monthly magazine in order to influence appropriate donations (figure 25).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure25.png}
\caption{Guidelines for inmates clothing, \textit{Our Waifs and Strays}, March 1887, p. 3}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{476} Richmond, \textit{Clothing the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England}, p. 186–212.
\textsuperscript{477} Ibid. Richmond points to charities’ reliance on partnerships with needlework groups, ‘The Dorcas’ societies, Mothers’ Meetings and other local clothing charities. For WSS clothing schemes, see ‘The Odd Minute Coterie’, \textit{Our Waifs and Strays} (March, 1906), p. 214. The Odd Minute Coterie was a working party of ladies established in 1905, with the purpose to entirely clothe several children in WSS care through donated clothing and the production of new clothing. In 1905, 305 garments were donated or produced, 44 of which were distributed to 4 named children in care. The remainder was sent to WSS homes in need of clothing.
The clothing list appears to be generous given that many other institutions were meticulous about keeping clothing costs to a minimum. A number of historians have highlighted that this cost-effective or low-cost clothing provision often resulted in the poor quantity and quality of inmates’ attire.\(^{478}\) David Pam’s survey of clothing given to inmates at Enfield workhouse during the earlier part of the century demonstrates just how meagre provision was for both male and female inmates. The typical provision of clothing to pauper women and girls entering the workhouse in the first half of the nineteenth century included 1 hat, 2 caps, 1 gown, 1 pair of stays, 2 petticoats, 2 shifts, 1 pair of shoes, 2 pairs of stockings, 2 handkerchiefs and 2 aprons. Meanwhile, men and boys were provided with 1 coat, 1 waistcoat, 1 pair of breeches, 2 shirts, 1 pair of shoes, 2 pairs of stockings, and 1 hat.\(^{479}\) In contrast, the Society’s list of clothing suggests that children were provided with a greater range and more expensive items than workhouse inmates, such as boots and shoes, as well as a greater range of non-essential items, such as handkerchiefs. The provision of collars to boys was also significant, since white collars, as Clare Rose highlights, served as a ‘statement of respectability’.\(^{480}\) Breeches for boys conveyed a similar sense of respectability.\(^{481}\) Shorts were cheaper but, as Rose suggests, also associated with low occupational status.

It is also possible that some inmates possessed a range of clothing that exceeded the Society’s guidelines. Matrons and masters were responsible for the distribution of clothing sent directly to the homes from local patrons and working

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\(^{480}\) Clare Rose, *Making, Selling and Wearing Boys’ Clothes in Late-Victorian England* (Ashgate, 2010), pp. 51–53

parties. It is likely that staff allocated clothing according to need, size, suitability and purpose. Although no evidence survives, it is possible that staff took children’s preference and choice into account. As Richmond suggests, institutional staff sometimes allocated best clothing as a reward to patients that demonstrated progress towards recovery.\(^{482}\) No records survive to suggest that WSS staff employed a similar practice, but the allocation of certain clothing within each home was likely to have promoted feelings of identity among some inmates. Furthermore, as Hamlett and Hoskins suggest, the staff members’ flexibility in accommodating inmates’ self-fashionsing and display of individuality, could enhance inmates’ feelings of comfort as well as their sense of being able to maintain vital links with the outside world, some degree of agency and independence.\(^{483}\)

WSS practices that encouraged the growth of individual identities were inextricable from the moral agenda of training children. While the lack of uniforms allowed the Society to nurture children’s sense of individual identity and worth, the requirement for children to look after their own clothes also taught them important values of pride in appearance and respectability. The provision of Sunday dress for boys and girls, whilst a non-essential clothing item in welfare provision, was important in fostering children’s pride in their appearance, self-respect, and care for their clothing.\(^{484}\) Richmond highlights that Sunday best clothing was aspirational for many poorer individuals and that for some families, these items were usually kept in their local pawnshops.\(^{485}\) Pawning clothes including children’s and husbands’ Sunday clothing each week was a vital strategy of providing money to help poorer families survive until payday, when they would be collected again on Saturday.\(^{486}\) The provision of Sunday clothing was also advocated in other institutions, as Hamlett and Hoskins highlight. Institutional staff in one asylum in Bristol provided Sunday clothing to patients, and understood patients’ desire for this clothing to signal their progress towards recovery.\(^{487}\)

\(^{482}\) Richmond, *Clothing the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England*, p. 270.

\(^{483}\) Hamlett and Hoskins, ‘Comfort in Small Things?’, pp. 16–22.

\(^{484}\) Richmond, *Clothing the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England*, pp. 269–270.

\(^{485}\) Ibid., p. 85.

\(^{486}\) Ibid.

\(^{487}\) Hamlett and Hoskins, ‘Comfort in Small Things?’, p. 7.
Photographs confirm that children undertook the regular cleaning and mending of clothes, including Sunday best, as well as polishing footwear. These tasks were significant for a number of reasons. First, they taught children to exert some concern over their appearance, thus reinforcing the importance of maintaining a respectable appearance. These duties helped to raise awareness of basic standards of hygiene, clean and neat clothing amongst inmates, whom the Society may have considered poor children were ignorant about.

Secondly, the adequate care of clothing cultivated thrift, ensuring that children valued the longevity and durability of clothing. This also alleviated pressure on institutions to replace certain items and facilitated a degree of recycling clothes among children. These duties also taught children ‘transferable’ skills of cleaning and caring for possessions that could be put to use in domestic and work environments, upon inmates’ discharge. Finally, the condition and quality of WSS children’s clothing was integral to the public image of the Society, and children in the institution had some responsibility over how these ideals were communicated to the wider world.

Despite the Society’s aim to eliminate uniforms within their homes, photographs suggest that marked similarities existed in the types and appearance of clothing children wore in the homes. As Rebecca Wynter argues, that even when uniforms were not intentional in welfare institutions, purchases of bulk clothing, with a preference for certain styles, fabrics and colours, often produced a similar appearance among inmates.⁴⁸⁸ Photographs indicate that several elements of clothing tended to be standardised or at least popular: this included white collars and double-breasted jackets for boys (figure 26). Children’s work clothing was also similar: one photograph depicts a group of girls wearing white pinafores to protect their dresses (figure 27). The dresses of dark material, white aprons and white caps was similar to that worn by domestic servants, and in all likelihood formed part of the preparatory training for these girls who would shortly be entering this employment.⁴⁸⁹

More informal photographs of girls enjoying a day at the beach indicate that dresses were usually made of darker, plain fabrics with little pattern and

⁴⁸⁸ Wynter, “‘Good in all respects’”, p.46.
⁴⁸⁹ For nineteenth-century domestic servant attire, see Richmond, Clothing the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England, p. 256.
although subtle differences can be observed in the cut and detail of the dresses, clothing remains similar in style (figure 28). That some girls look like they are wearing the same dress might be explained by the use of standardised dress patterns: ladies’ work parties or the girls themselves probably used and shared the same patterns to make these dresses. It is likely that darker, robust fabrics were chosen so they did not look dirty quickly and to ensure their durability. As Richmond highlights, darker, robust fabrics of linen and wool were typically worn by the working and poorer classes, but growing affordability of cheap cotton meant that clothing of bright colours and print were increasingly available to these classes. 490 Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, it is likely that WSS clothing made of dark, thicker materials marked out inmates’ relatively low status in society. Darker fabrics were probably used for children’s everyday clothing because of the cheapness of dye. 491

Other clothing, however, was commonly associated with higher-class status. One photograph depicts two residents dressed in sailor suits that were increasingly popular garments from the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly for middle-class children (figure 29). Rose argues that by the later decades of the nineteenth century, sailor suits were worn by children across all social classes, and that the outfit embodied multiple meanings beyond its ‘expression of Imperial ethos’. 492 The loose collar and unfitted body of mass-manufactured children’s sailor suits distanced itself from naval uniforms worn by adults and instead reinforced its status as a highly fashionable item of clothing. 493

The similarities in clothing can be accounted for in different ways: the popularity of fashions, affordability of specific fabrics, as well as advertisements for specific clothing patterns in WSS monthly magazines that guided supporters wishing to make or donate clothing for children. These conditions therefore, helped to dictate the style of clothing inmates wore. Despite their intentions to reject uniforms within the institution, the Society paradoxically opted for relatively narrow guidelines for clothing children, which meant that WSS attire became more uniform-like.

491 Ibid., p. 246.
FIGURE 26. St Christopher’s Home, Hunstanton, c. 1910

*From HLR archive*

FIGURE 27. St Mary’s, Cold Ash, c. 1894, *Our Waifs and Strays*, November 1894, p. 365
FIGURE 28. ‘At the beach’, unknown home, c.1915

From HLR archive

FIGURE 29. St Aidan’s Home for Boys, c. 1918

From HLR archive
Family-time rituals and the rationale of the treat

John Gillis highlights that the concept of family time and the rituals associated with family life expanded exponentially during the nineteenth century. A number of special rituals, such as the celebration of Christmas, birthdays and summer vacations to the countryside or seaside, became increasingly popular amongst the middle and working classes as an important time for creating special meaning and memories of family time. Children also assumed a central position of significance in the celebration and the enactment of these family rituals. The increasing significance attached to the concept of family and family time extended to the working classes. Historians such as John Walton and Susan Barton, for example, have examined the growth of the seaside holiday over the nineteenth century for the working classes, as well as their campaigning efforts to secure paid holidays. Other more general rituals and treats for children were entrenched in working-class popular culture, including Whitsun outings, Sunday School trips, Empire Day celebrations, May Day events and other red-letter days, galas, processions, as well as treats and prizes received at school.

Given that holidays, family time, other celebrations and events were deeply embedded in middle-class and working-class cultures, it is unsurprising therefore that residential institutions incorporated a range of rituals and treats into patterns of daily life for inmates. These rituals and treats intended to imitate those associated with family life, and served to provide different ideological and affective purposes for inmates. Records do not state that biological relatives were involved in the celebration of these rituals in the institution, and in all likelihood, were excluded from these events – ‘family time’ in the institution referred to unity and togetherness with co-residents and carers only. Within WSS homes, Christmas was the family time par excellence, but treats and ‘family time’ extended to holidays, day trips and outings, visitors and afternoon teas, lavish

494 Gillis, A World of Their Own Making, pp. 81–108.
495 Ibid., p. 72.
meals on special occasions, pocket money, birthday cakes and parties, toys and other play items, and even an extra five minutes playtime.\textsuperscript{498}

Whilst treats and privileges created a sense of pleasure and respite from daily institutional life, they were also inextricable from children’s moral training. These systems of treats, rewards and special privileges played different roles in creating a sense of individual and collective identity for inmates. Special occasions and celebratory events in the homes helped to create a fantasy of ideal family life that was important for inmates’ training and development for a number of reasons. First, these rituals, especially the treating of children by matrons and masters – a duty usually associated with mothering and fathering – sought to teach inmates the value of individual, personalised care.

Daniel Miller’s research on shopping, love and devotion suggests that treats are often used to individualise any family member as the recipient of something special, whether a gift or a purchase and that for children in particular, the treat is often interpreted as symbolic, in material terms, of the attention, time and fondness of those who care for them.\textsuperscript{499} Not only could this treatment reaffirm or enhance inmates’ feelings of self-worth, it also communicated a range of ideal affective emotions associated with caring for children that the Society hoped that inmates would put to use to care for their own families in years to come. Teaching children the importance of love, kindness and affection might help break the cycle of fecklessness, neglect, ambivalence and abuse that reformers believed inmates had encountered prior to admission.\textsuperscript{500} In addition, staff members’ articulation of kindness and care towards children also sought to strengthen interpersonal connections with inmates and the likelihood that these ties might prove longer-lasing than their period of care.


Treats also helped to promote the socialisation and bonding of co-residents and carers as a family unit within the institution through the shared conception and enactment of ‘family time’. These activities helped to establish the idea of belonging more concretely. Collective treats, such as home holidays and excursions, aimed to enhance feelings of family togetherness. This was crucial to forging collective memories and identities. As Gillis highlights leisure and holiday time for families are often the times where individuals are their most ‘authentic’ selves, or at the least, remembered that way.\footnote{Gillis, A World of Their Own Making, p. 105–108. See also, Strange, Fatherhood and the British Working Class, pp. 114–122.} These fond recollections that families have about their connection with each other during these times, thus helps to confirm these occasions and rituals as good for creating memories that can be regarded with nostalgia.\footnote{Strange, Fatherhood and the British Working Class, pp. 111–145.} Furthermore, by privileging individual children within the sense of the collective identity of the institutional family, the Society sought to nuance and personalise the institutional experience for inmates.

The very nature of treats, rewards and privileges is that they are occasional and special. As proceeding analysis demonstrates, treating children collectively within the institution was usually limited to specific annual events, such as Christmas and summer holidays, and therefore fairly infrequent in annual calendars. It is likely therefore, that these occasions held special and significant meaning for recipients. Miller suggests that treats can be understood as a transgressive practice – luxuries that were made possible by disregarding usual rules, budgets and routines.\footnote{Miller, A Theory of Shopping, p. 41.} It is possible that this transgressive nature of treats was even more explicit for WSS children from poor backgrounds, where treats and family togetherness were likely to have been scarce, since low incomes were quickly spent on basic necessities and family members who could, were expected to work.\footnote{Working-class children were expected to contribute to the domestic economy as soon as they were able to. For more on patterns and expectations of child labour, see Anna Davin, ‘Child Labour, the Working-Class Family and Domestic Ideology in Nineteenth-Century Britain’, Development and Change, 13 (1982), pp. 633–652; Jane Lewis, Labour and love: women’s experience of home and family, 1850–1940 (Oxford, 1986); Jane Humphries, Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution.} Ellen Ross argues that for some poorer families, Sunday dinner held
some special meaning – slightly more money was spent on making a ‘memory’ of the occasion, which would last until the next Sunday.\textsuperscript{505} In institutional care, where daily life was regulated by routine, luxuries of extravagance, disruption of routine, special regard for individuals and increased expenditure associated with treats, were likely to have been explicit and held particular significance for inmates. The relatively infrequent celebration of special occasions must have reinforced their value within WSS homes.

Other smaller treats, such as afternoon teas and seaside holidays, depended on a number of variables, including home budgets and the generosity of patrons and supporters from local communities.\textsuperscript{506} The girls at Arnold Grove Home were invited to a local lady’s home to celebrate her birthday in May 1891, where the girls stayed until 7pm, spending their time by playing games and were provided with tea and musical entertainments.\textsuperscript{507} In addition, another member of the local community, Mrs Burton, invited the Arnold Grove matron and inmates to spend an afternoon having tea in the hay-field and playing games until 9pm.\textsuperscript{508} The reliance on charity from patrons as well as the local community to enable the treat, in all likelihood, had implications on inmates’ identity.

WSS home staff expressed their gratitude to those that made summer holidays possible in Our Waifs and Strays, and it is evident that children were usually well aware of the identity of these donors. As Gillis demonstrates, summer holidays away from home were slower to be adopted by the working classes in the nineteenth century. WSS holidays reinforced ideals of extraordinary family time usually associated with the middle classes.\textsuperscript{509} One article indicates that a supporter, Reverend Boyd, donated the use of his Rectory Barn in Cliffe–at–Hoo for a week to the boys at the Islington Home. Reverend Boyd’s kindness was formally acknowledged in the magazine, and the account demonstrates that inmates and staff spent a week with the Reverend, playing

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{Cambridge2010} Cambridge, 2010; Davin, Growing Up Poor, pp. 157–190; Ross, Love and Toil, pp. 158–162.
\bibitem{Ross2010} Ross, Love and Toil, pp. 38–39.
\bibitem{Invitations1891} These invitations are abundant and feature in almost every issue of the monthly magazine in regular features such as ‘News from the Branches’ and ‘Notes from the Homes’.
\bibitem{NewsBranches1891} ‘News from the Branches’, Our Waifs and Strays (September, 1891), p. 2.
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid.
\bibitem{Gillis2010} Gillis, A World of Their Own Making, pp. 104–106.
\end{thebibliography}
games and sports, running in fields and walking in woodlands, and going to the sea.\textsuperscript{510} Whilst it was fairly normal for children’s trips to be subsidised in working-class culture, it is possible that gifts to make seaside holidays possible, reinforced children’s feelings as ‘charity’ children, especially given their status as institutionalised welfare recipients and feelings of being forsaken or unwanted that many historians have argued it elicited.\textsuperscript{511}

\textbf{Christmas in WSS homes}

Like many other practices within the institution, the ideological benefit of treats for inmates was inseparable from more pragmatic concerns. The magazines gave the Society a public platform to offer a carefully constructed image of the value of their work and the positive experiences of the children it cared for. Regular features, such as ‘Notes from the Homes’ articles in January and February issues of \textit{Our Waifs and Strays}, were devoted to recounting the Christmas festivities that took place in the homes. September and October issues related children’s summer holidays to its readership, and accounts of other treats including high teas, birthday celebrations and magic lantern shows were published throughout the year.\textsuperscript{512} These occasions, the magazine claimed, also generated much correspondence from matrons, masters and inmates’ themselves. Correspondence published in the magazines and presented as inmates’ letters, depicted a range of positive and happy childhood experiences elicited by these festivities and events, which served to encourage donors to imagine that their support was valued and meaningful to recipients on an individual and personal level.

These articles were significant in helping the Society to grow its support in an increasingly competitive environment for donations. First, positive accounts of the Society’s care helped the WSS differentiate its work to that of Poor Law institutions, which the Society had regularly criticised in magazines

\textsuperscript{510} ‘How the Lads Spent their Holiday’, \textit{Our Waifs and Strays} (October, 1903), pp. 170–171.
for their inadequacy in providing inmates with individual and personalised care. These accounts also helped boost the WSS’s position as a fierce competitor for funds with other major charities operating at the time, such as Barnardo’s. As the Society’s main competitor for funding, given the similarity in the nature of their mission, Barnardo knew only too well the value of such publicity. The WSS emphasised their care and investment in inmates in order to contend for support.

Furthermore, correspondence that the Society claimed was from inmates highlighted children’s’ gratitude for treats and personalised care. This helped the Society to demonstrate to potential supporters just how well-placed they were in creating well-rounded citizens for the future, a primary concern of many children’s charities of the time. In doing so, and often alongside regular pleas for support, the Society legitimised their work and greatly enhanced support for their mission. Their fundraising success is apparent: annual accounts demonstrate that income amounted to nearly £740 in their first year, which grew to approximately £2,118 in their second year. By the fourth year, the charity had raised of £8,500 through their fundraising and campaigning efforts. By 1900, income had increased to £73,175 with an expenditure of £69,770, of which the majority was spent on the direct costs of supporting children in their homes.

Institutional literature suggests that the socialisation of inhabitants not only created a sense of family, but also encouraged children to recognise the importance of family time. The Society demanded that Christmas – described as

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514 For Barnardo’s use of publicity to further his cause, see Gillian Wagner, Barnardo (London, 1979), Murdoch, Imagine Orphans, pp. 16–42; Swain and Hillel, Child, nation, race and empire, pp. 16–39.

515 See, Murdoch, Imagined Orphans, pp. 120–162; Swain and Hillel, Child, nation, race and empire, pp. 129–159.

516 See Report of the Executive Committee of the Church of England Central Society for providing homes for Waifs and Strays (March 31st, 1885), p. 3.

‘the Festival of the Home’\textsuperscript{518} – should be the time when the sense of belonging and family was most present in children’s imagination.\textsuperscript{519} Kindness, compassion and individual attention were key messages of the Christmas season that all charities took advantage of to generate additional support.\textsuperscript{520} For the WSS, these key messages held specific significance given its Protestant ethos: the very nature of its work taking in unwanted children echoed the story of the Holy Family seeking room at the inn. Magazine readers were reminded of this mission to provide for the outcast in one article that urged supporters to help them by showing their generosity by providing treats for inmates:

In the midst of our Christmas joys, surrounded by those we love…we trust friends will remember we have a large family to provide for on Christmas Day and we shall be most grateful for contributions in kind for the Christmas dinner; for sweets, crackers and dolls for the children.\textsuperscript{521}

In calling Christmas the ‘Festival of the Home’ and using the language of ‘large family’, the Society reminded readers of the Christian and secular significance of the occasion. First, that Christmas was the most significant example of family time in the annual calendar and the time of humanity. In a secular sense, by the late nineteenth century, Neil Armstrong and Gillis highlight that Christmas already had huge commercial value, and was widely acknowledged by society to be a time for family, children and celebration.\textsuperscript{522} Secondly, the statement also reminded readers of the religious significance of their mission by making the nativity story – providing shelter to the Christian family – concrete in their homes.

\textsuperscript{518} ‘Quiet Thoughts for Spare Moments’, \textit{Our Waifs and Strays} (December, 1906), p. 333.
\textsuperscript{521} ‘Jottings’, \textit{Our Waifs and Strays} (December, 1895), p. 185, 190.
The monthly magazine suggests that special attention and treats at Christmas and during other occasions would create a ‘bright memory’ for inmates by bringing ‘some sense of holiday’ and ‘family union’. The Society argued that it was specifically the ‘family union’ that became inmates’ ‘abounding source of happiness’, and that the institutional family, rather than biological relatives, was responsible for ‘bestow[ing] these blessings’. Importantly too, Christmas celebrations helped the Society to socialise children into Christian values as part of their moral training to produce good citizens. These statements indicate the Society’s desire for the institutional family, forged through ordinary and extraordinary practices, to define the childhood of WSS inmates as extra-institutional. The magazine positioned family togetherness as ideologically important in its implication that the families children originate from did not adequately fulfil these duties. The magazine therefore perpetuates the assumption that poor children in care had never a ‘sense of holiday’ and that ‘family time’ was usually non-existent.

Annual donation lists also provide further insight into the ways in which the material culture of Christmas celebrations within the institution sought to mimic practices associated with the idealised middle-class family Christmas, albeit translated into benevolent charitable acts towards lower-class children. As Gillis highlights, the culture of gift giving began very modestly among the middle classes in the late nineteenth century, whilst working classes had little use for this practice of symbolic exchange. Armstrong further demonstrates the increasing popularity for middle-class donors to provide gifts to children’s charities at Christmas, as part of their perceived duty to providing for the poor. Gillis also demonstrates that prior to the nineteenth century, gift exchange at Christmas was largely between strangers, which involved charitable giving, rather than between family members.

WSS records confirm that patrons donated a multitude of children’s toys, individual presents for inmates, Christmas trees and food to each home as

523 ‘News and Views’, p. 5
524 Ibid.
525 Gillis, A World of Their Own Making, p. 79.
527 Gillis, A World of Their Own Making, p. 79.
Christmas gifts.\textsuperscript{528} Institutional staff also implemented gift-giving traditions within the home on Christmas day, to help reinforce social solidarity and emotional bonds. Matrons and masters usually gave small personal gifts to inmates, and this practice distinguished this type of gift giving from the relatively anonymous but multiple festive treats organised by local patrons and missions for working-class children in general. Matrons and masters act of gift giving enhanced the individual and personalised attention of children within the homes, in contrast to general acts of charity. This practice, as Steve Humphries suggests, intended to instil middle-class mores and values in children, and thereby contributed to inmates’ moral training.\textsuperscript{529} The Society also encouraged children’s engagement in the wider, secular rituals of Christmas. The WSS encouraged volunteers to dress as Santa Claus, which had largely been unpopular with Protestant and catholic clergyman earlier in the century as Gillis highlights.\textsuperscript{530} This practice, promoted by a charity with a Protestant ethos, demonstrated their recognition of the growing secular popularity of familial celebrations of Christmas in society, and the benefits these rituals afforded in creating a memorable and joyous occasion for charity children in particular.

Letters supposedly written by children relating accounts of Christmas spent in the homes and published in the monthly magazines, present Christmas dinner as the most anticipated event for inmates. Letters depict in great detail the food consumed by inmates, whilst donation lists confirm the variety of foods given by supporters to the homes. Popular donations for Christmas dinner included beef, mutton, turkey, goose, oranges, plum puddings, cakes and sweets. Children were also often given lemonade on Christmas day as a treat.\textsuperscript{531} These representations emphasised the value of the treat and how far they defined children’s experiences: such luxuries were a far cry from regular diet of stews and soups of meat and vegetables drawn up by medical officers in order to

\textsuperscript{528} See ‘Diocesan News–Leamington’, \textit{Our Waifs and Strays} (December, 1895), p. 187. The ‘Gifts’ and ‘With Thanks’ features of \textit{Our Waifs and Strays} in December and January each year also highlight the extent of charitable giving to inmates.


\textsuperscript{530} Gillis, \textit{A World of Their Own Making}, pp. 100–101.

\textsuperscript{531} ‘Notes from the Homes’, \textit{Our Waifs and Strays} (February, 1903), p. 28.
provide variety and wholesomeness.⁵³² One magazine letter to Rudolf published in 1886 describes the importance associated with Christmas dinner and the boys’ excitement in one home, stating:

Miss White, [the matron] tells us boys she is sure you would like to hear how happy us have been this Christmas we had plum pudding, roast beef and mince pies for our Christmas dinner us boys had never such nice things like that before then.⁵³³

Whilst magazine letters suggest inmates’ excitement about food, Christmas dinner was also significant as a time that forged bonds of family through the rituals of sharing food, and more sociable aspects including talking and joining in with the fun of celebrating the festivity over the dinner table.⁵³⁴ It is likely that Christmas dinner was a direct contrast to usual mealtimes, especially in the larger homes, which were probably highly routined and children were expected to behave appropriately and keep quiet.

Photographs of celebrations and festivities in the homes provide further detail about the festive material culture of the institution and children’s experiences. A photograph of the Christmas dinner at one home demonstrates the symbolic importance attached to the event (figure 30). The image shows a multitude of evergreen decorations, the use of tablecloths and best clothing worn by the children to suggest that Christmas was an exceptional time within the institution, especially when compared to photographs of the usual arrangement of dining rooms. The use of tablecloths and inmates’ wearing best dress marks out Christmas dinner as a particularly special time within the homes. Matrons’ seats at the end of the table – whilst indicating a need to supervise children – also suggest some degree of closeness, approachability or intimacy reserved for special occasions. At other times of the year, photographs indicate that staff members supervised daily meals from separate tables to inmates during the rest

⁵³³ ‘Correspondence’, Our Waifs and Strays (February, 1886), p. 8.
⁵³⁴ For importance attached to mealtimes in the nineteenth century, see Strange, ‘Fatherhood, furniture and the inter–personal dynamics of working-class homes’, p. 278; Gillis, A World of Their Own Making, pp. 90–95; Ross, Love and Toil, pp. 38–39.
of the year. These practices emphasised the institution’s attempts to create a sense of togetherness and ‘family’ unity within the homes.

FIGURE 30. ‘Christmas Dinner at St Chad’s Home’, Brothers and Sisters, April 1907, p. 102

Written accounts and correspondence published in WSS magazines provide valuable insight into how inmates’ experiences at the homes were presented and imagined. Letters from matrons and masters of WSS homes, published in Our Waifs and Strays, promoted positive images that legitimated the Society’s work and acknowledged the generosity of its supporters to a wider public sphere. Staff at the Arnold Grove Home confirmed in 1893 that their supporters had ‘filled to overflowing, not only our stocking, but our larders and our hearts’. Meanwhile, staff at Hanley Castle stated it was a ‘great pleasure to see their happy faces’ upon handing out presents to each child. Staff at the Exeter home stated that children ‘had never had or thought of such a Christmas Day’. These statements also gave donors added status by presenting their donations as having a direct impact on the positive moral development of children. Letters and accounts published in WSS magazines were reciprocal in nature – stories that

535 See chapter 3, pp. 122–126.
extolled the picturesque and moral aspects of Christmas in the homes provided gratification and legitimisation to donors in return for gifts.

Other accounts detailed the rituals of Christmas preparations and the festivities on the day itself, and offered readers a sense of the intimacy of family life within WSS homes. Girls at the Exeter Home awoke their matron in the morning by singing carols outside her door, before attending a church service. Christmas dinner and a special visit from Santa Claus followed.538 Boys at Elm Lodge, Liverpool decorated each room with evergreens before Christmas day whilst inmates taught new boys the unfamiliar routines of stocking hanging.539 That new institutional inhabitants were presented as not knowing about secular traditions of stocking hanging emphasised the material, social and affective benefits to children in WSS care. Children’s ignorance of apparently simple rituals associated with Christmas reminded readers of the deprivation and want of many inmates in their care. In stark relief to this assumed lack of material and emotional nurture, magazine descriptions of the special occasions at WSS homes evoked a vision of family affection and intimacy between institutional inhabitants, irrespective of their class or circumstances. These descriptions helped the WSS to carefully construct an image of the interpersonal relationships between inhabitants that imitated their vision of the ideal family unit.

Numerous magazine letters from inmates to Rudolf detailed their Christmas experiences, but these letters were possibly edited or fictional accounts that provided a carefully constructed and positive view of the Society’s work. These letters do, however, provide insight into the Society’s perception of positive practice. A common trope in magazine letters was to suggest the novelty of Christmas festivities to formerly deprived children: Richard B, aged 8, described the joy of a Christmas dinner stating ‘us boys never had such nice things like that before…we are very happy little boys’.540 The letter served to remind readers how lucky institutional inmates were in comparison to those who

538 Ibid.
539 ‘Notes from the North-Liverpool Diocesan Branch’, Our Waifs and Strays (February, 1904), p. 241.
were not fortunate enough to have escaped disadvantage and poverty, thus legitimising the Society’s work.

Another letter published in the magazine in 1909 related the ‘happy time’ the residents spent over Christmas in the Hedgerley Home. The account detailed the routines for Christmas preparations: cleaning and decorating every room in the home, and the ritual of hanging mistletoe. The letter also stated that each boy received a present from a group of local WSS supporters, and that much excitement was caused over the threepenny bits found in the Christmas pudding.

Photographs were also taken of the inmates to mark the occasion and to serve as sentimental reminders of the supposedly happy memories shared in the home. The letter concluded, stating ‘I don’t ever remember spending such a jolly Christmas, and I must thank you for sending me to this Home’. Such a statement served only to reinforce the Society’s legitimacy and success in their child rescue work by presenting inmates as collectively grateful for the quality of care they received in the homes. The statement suggests that the festive ritual was not just about creating special time in the WSS home, but also about the separation of time with biological family, which by implication, was not ‘jolly’. That the boy himself is imagined to say this held additional meaning in children’s supposed confirmation that their removal from biological relatives and adoption into the institutional family was right. Moreover, the use of Christmas as a foreground in this statement is significant because of its status as the primary occasion for family time, both in religious and affective terms.

Other letters written by matrons and masters present staff as being proud of creating positive and happy childhood memories for inmates. A letter from the matron at St Nicholas’ Home in Pyrford recounted their Christmas scenes including the laughter and delight of the children who awoke in the morning to find that the stocking beside each bed had been well filled. The residents were also said to be much excited to receive a visit from Father Christmas himself on Christmas morning whom, with the matron’s help, distributed Christmas presents to each child.

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542 Ibid., p. 32.
543 Ibid.
For many children, Christmas was associated with children’s games and recreation. A girl in the Cold Ash Home detailed their festivities, which included the matron playing games with the children and the acting out of three scenes from Alice in Wonderland. The children at Cold Ash also sang carols outside the matron’s door on Christmas morning to wake her, and received a ‘great number of presents’ from donors, the matron and the home committee.\textsuperscript{544} The account suggests that games and leisure not only provided sociable opportunities with children’s co-residents, but that the medium of regulated and ritualised fun served to foster and reinforce relationships between the staff and inmates in particular.

It is difficult to determine how genuine published letters were. The Christmas experiences supposedly recounted by children and staff suggest that the provision of a lavish, ‘homely’ festival replete with a sense of family time were at the heart of the Society’s endeavours. Notably, WSS accounts of Christmas treats mimic the published accounts of many other charitable institutions’ festive activities, suggesting shared tropes of picturesque festivities in philanthropic discourse.\textsuperscript{545} However, accounts of these treats had greater propaganda value in allowing the Society to compare their work favourably and competitively to that of other institutions. The WSS claimed that childhood spent under their care afforded children much greater opportunities for development, particularly in emotional terms, than other forms of institutional care, which in comparison were characterised by the ‘absence of natural pleasures and human interests’, and where life was ‘dreary and colourless enough’.\textsuperscript{546}

As Armstrong, Gavin Weightman and Steve Humphries demonstrate, however, many other charities were creating similar Christmas festivities for their inmates.\textsuperscript{547} As such, WSS practices were unlikely to have been exceptional in promoting notions of care, family and fun in comparison. Such statements of comparison demonstrate that charities like the WSS were well aware of common

\textsuperscript{544}‘Correspondence’, \textit{Our Waifs and Strays Magazine} (February, 1911), p. 35
\textsuperscript{546} ‘A Comparison’, \textit{Our Waifs and Strays} (June, 1891), pp. 4–5.
narratives for festive treats, which promoted not only an imagined ideal of Christmas, but also a notion of ‘other’ institutional care that was presented as inferior. These comparisons played on the negative stereotypes of institutionalised life that were created and perpetuated by institutions seeking to self-promote. Moreover, accounts of treats and family time in the institution too, were positioned as direct contrasts to childhood experience within the biological family. Magazine articles regarding the conditions of biological families, for the most part, drew attention to representations of destitution, where treats and family time were assumed to be luxuries ill-afforded. The ideological purchase of these narratives self legitimised the Society’s care positioning it as superior to that of the biological family.

**Summer holidays**

Like Christmas, accounts of inmates’ summer holidays filled the pages of *Our Waifs and Strays* in September and October issues. Accounts suggest that during holidays, institutional home timetables changed significantly to reflect the end of the school year and while children were still expected to complete household chores, they also enjoyed more free time spent outside for leisure and play. Girls at the home in Knoyle were employed during part of every day learning to make a ‘Sunday pinafore’, but in their free time roamed outdoors picking fruit to make jam. Meanwhile, boys at the Knebworth Home spent much of their time helping neighbours in their local village with odd jobs. An account of their holiday period proclaimed that for one ‘blissful week they ran wild in the hay fields, helping the kind owner “to make his hay”’. Such descriptions promoted an image of the importance of children’s community contribution and inclusion, as well as the value of a seemingly wholesome, therapeutic pastoral life and regular engagement with nature, which will be explored later in this chapter.

Excursions, camps, sporting events, outdoor play and other treats were promoted by the Society as the most important activities associated with summer holidays. These events were particularly significant to childhood experience and

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548 ‘Cameos from life–worse than motherless’, *Our Waifs and Strays* (July, 1905), p. 120.
549 ‘Notes from the Homes–Knoyle’, *Our Waifs and Strays* (October, 1889), p. 4.
550 ‘Notes from the Homes–Knebworth’, *Our Waifs and Strays* (September, 1889), p. 4.
the WSS hoped that these events would be ‘long stored up in memories and lived again in the dark winter days’. Each home took inmates on holiday each year, usually to seaside towns, which had become increasingly popular holiday destinations by the end of the century for both the working and middle classes, following the advent of cheap railway travel. In 1908, the Society stated that ‘it is very important that out boys and girls should, especially in the town Homes, be given at least a fortnight’s change of air’. Like many other charities, the WSS believed that the seaside town had the potential to transform children, especially their physical health. Poor children from urban slums, in particular, would benefit from the fresh sea-air, and would be excited to see the sea. Trips to the seaside were common treats for working-class children that were not in institutional care too.

Holidays were usually only made possible through the generosity of local supporters, and as such many homes advertised their annual holiday fund in WSS magazine in order to encourage donations. Rather than a general holiday fund, individual funds for each home were likely to have motivated donors to feel greater affinity to WSS work by contributing to a local and community cause. Inmates also organised special events, such as sales of work, to generate the funds needed to go on holiday. Inmates at St Aidan’s Home, Tynemouth were able to cover the whole expense to go on holiday by selling their garden produce, although the amount they raised is not recorded. Letters from institutional staff published in fundraising literature drew attention to just how much children valued holidays.

The matron at Belbroughton Home stated that the children are ‘hoping to hear by every post, that it will be possible for them to spend a fortnight, three

554 There were many ‘Fresh Air’ and ‘Holiday’ funds set up by charities to enable children to visit the seaside for health and convalescence. See, Marjorie Cruickshank, ‘The Open-Air Movement in English Education’, Pedagogica Historica, 17 (1977), p. 63.
555 Cruickshank, ‘The Open-Air Movement in English Education’, pp. 69–70.
557 ‘Not At Home’, Our Waifs and Strays (October, 1908), p. 419.
weeks, or a month, at the seaside this summer, as funds allow! Inmates had already raised a sum of £10 for their ‘Seaside Fund’ through performances of Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty, as well as sales of work. In writing, the letter employed a popular fundraising tactic to present the funds already raised and appeal for additional funds to make the trip possible. This strategy had greater emotive appeal to potential donors: supporters would be encouraged to make a gift to ensure that the hard work of the children would not be wasted, and that inmates would not be disappointed. The letter appealed for help in recommending, or indeed donating the use of, a seaside home on the Welsh Coast at low or no cost, as well as play items such as ‘buckets and spades’ which would ‘add greatly to the children’s joy’.

By the end of the nineteenth-century, seaside holidays were increasingly popular amongst the working classes. That the WSS appealed for donors to help send inmates to the seaside demonstrates that they acknowledged this was becoming a customary ritual for working-class families, but also tapped into popular tropes of the value of seaside holidays for poor urban children’s health. Promoting the seaside holiday as an integral part of inmates’ leisure helped the Society to promote the quality of their care: that these holidays were beneficial not only to childhood experience, but for the added value to their health.

Accounts of children’s holidays published in institutional magazines intended for supporters, validated the Society’s work while also offering an idealised view of childhood experience in residential care. These accounts assured readers that holidays helped inmates to share positive experiences and to build lasting memories of fun and family time, which was superior to that of other institutions and in children’s biological families. One article stated that the girls from the Kensington Training Home had spent their holiday in 1901 near Bognor enabled by a donation of £25. The girls spent much of their time outside, walking and bathing on the beach. They were also allowed to sleep on a boat in

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558 ‘Correspondence’, *Our Waifs and Strays* (July, 1908), p. 400.
559 Ibid.
560 Ibid.
the garden of the home they were staying in, which during the night became afloat at high tide. The article confirmed that this caused ‘much excitement’ amongst the girls.\footnote{Notes from the Homes’, Our Waifs and Strays (October, 1901), p. 172} This account was also valuable in suggesting that children’s holiday experiences allowed them freedom and an opportunity to demonstrate responsibility.

Like other treats within the institution, holidays provided inmates with an opportunity to demonstrate their independence by saving and spending the pocket money and savings they received. Case files demonstrate that the WSS opened a Post Office savings accounts for inmates, and children were able to deposit gifts of money or other savings they acquired during their time in care.\footnote{A number of PO savings books survive in children’s case files. See case files: 15024; 15321; 10699; 12880; 14061; 19855; 20182.}
The institution provided inmates with a small sum of pocket money each month in order to teach money management skills, thrift, self-sufficiency, responsibility and independence.\footnote{Thoughts, facts and fancies’, Our Waifs and Strays (November, 1886), pp. 7–8.}
Pocket money could also help foster aspiration in children, by teaching inmates the difference between items considered necessity and luxury.

Meanwhile, children’s relatives occasionally supplemented pocket money, by sending gifts of money on special occasions, such as birthdays or Christmas.\footnote{See HLR case file 1106, letter from Barnes Ladies Association 31/3/1892.}
Children often spent these personal allowances and savings whilst on holiday. Children from the Cold Ash Home were offered a day-trip on a steam-packet from Lee-on-Solent to Southsea by the captain for half-price. The account in Our Waifs and Strays stated that many of the girls were eager and paid for the trip from their own savings.\footnote{‘Notes from the Homes–Fareham’, Our Waifs and Strays Magazine (September, 1889), pp. 3–4.}
The freedom to spend their allowances on small treats of their own choosing, albeit within certain boundaries, was likely to have enhanced children’s sense of independence, individuality and identity.

One case file demonstrates that Mary A was left a sum of £33 17 shillings upon the death of her relatives, which Rudolf deposited on her behalf in her Post

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\footnote{Notes from the Homes’, Our Waifs and Strays (October, 1901), p. 172}
\footnote{A number of PO savings books survive in children’s case files. See case files: 15024; 15321; 10699; 12880; 14061; 19855; 20182.}
\footnote{Thoughts, facts and fancies’, Our Waifs and Strays (November, 1886), pp. 7–8.}
\footnote{See HLR case file 1106, letter from Barnes Ladies Association 31/3/1892.}
\footnote{‘Notes from the Homes–Fareham’, Our Waifs and Strays Magazine (September, 1889), pp. 3–4.}
That Mary was left such a large sum of money raises questions about why she was in care when family members could look after her. However, case file evidence shows that Mary was an illegitimate child that was unwanted by her mother, who gave birth to Mary in the workhouse. The Workhouse Master and his wife reported that Mary’s mother had an ‘indifferent’ attitude towards her and would be glad to be ‘rid of’ Mary. He applied for Mary’s admission to care. Whilst Mary had a much greater fortune in comparison to other inmates, the case file demonstrates that she did not have full control over her money whilst an institutional inmate. Instead, Rudolf acted as Trustee of her Savings Account, and in doing so, controlled her money and spending.

Photographs published in the magazine also allowed readers to gain insight into inmates’ experiences outside the institutional home and the ways in which memories of holidays and ‘family’ time were built within the homes. One photograph depicts inmates participating in popular holiday pastimes, such as donkey rides at the seaside (figure 31). That the matron is photographed alongside the boy suggested to readers that a bond of attachment existed between inmates and carers. As Gillis argues, family photographs had become ‘sacred’ objects and valuable souvenirs of family holidays by the late nineteenth-century. These photographs were commonly understood as tangible signs of connection between subjects. This photograph was similar in its purpose. The ‘family’ portrait of the boy and matron could function as a nostalgic reminder of household holidays, and connections with staff. Yet the formal dress of the matron, the studio-like appearance of the photograph as well as the matron’s physical contact with the boy, which appears more supervisory than affectionate in nature, suggests that the photograph possessed greater publicity value in allowing the Society to present their vision of imagined family and family time.

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568 HLR case file 6183, date of correspondence unknown (likely to be between 1910 and 1915).
569 HLR case file 6183, application form, September 1897.
570 Lack of control over savings was not uncommon as Delap highlights the extent of institutional and employers’ control over savings and wages for domestic servants. Delap, Knowing their Place, p. 52.
571 Gillis, A World of Their Own Making, p. 78.
572 Ibid.
Some children were also offered holidays by referrers and patrons who displayed a continued interest in overseeing their welfare. A lady interested in the care of one child at the Cold Ash Home offered her a week’s seaside holiday. The WSS observed the excitement caused by the prospect of the holiday exclaiming that ‘the child has been packing for the last three weeks’. Patrons’ personal and emotional investment in the care of individual children was not always perceived to be advantageous however. The apparent favouring of children was likely to have been read by their co-residents as a marker of difference that caused conflict and jealousy among less fortunate inhabitants, although records do not suggest how frequent this may have been within the homes. J. A. Mangan argues that bullying was commonplace in the English

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public school in the nineteenth century, and it is probable that this extended to WSS homes, where abuse and ill-treatment of inhabitants might have been instigated by children’s jealousy and perceptions of favouritism within the homes.574

Inextricable from WSS holidays was the idea that inmates should experience the natural environment to the fullest. Shaped by Romantic Movement ideals that positioned children as innocents who possessed a ‘higher state of spiritual perception’ than adults, the Society promoted the power of the natural physical environment as an important means of enabling inmates’ emotional and social development.575 Poor children’s relationship with nature was all the more important to the Society; removal from the corrupting urban and slum influences and exposure to the natural world would allow children to regain innocence and morality. Notions of inmates’ moral management through their engagement with nature, popular with asylum and other institutional officials, could affect the cleanliness, order and respectability of patients.576 Poor children would benefit from the natural environment since it reflected the moral order of the world, and encouraged inmates to lead an ordered and disciplined life. Inmates’ contact with nature therefore, intended to provide a system of moral therapy and healing that promoted the mental and physical health, emotional development and innocence of the child.

Within a Christian context, the natural environment was associated with divine being, offering a place of healing, solace and spiritual refreshment.577 This model of nurture was part of a much broader system of child rearing at the time, and therefore, not a unique practice of the institution. As Carolyn Steedman has demonstrated, reformer Margaret McMillan developed a detailed role for the

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garden in the nurture and education of working-class children at the end of the nineteenth century. The importance of the garden and nature was directly shaped by Friedrich Froebel’s earlier concept of the kindergarten, a model of child rearing that recognised the importance of the children’s engagement and activity in learning through experience. Meanwhile, Clare Hickman demonstrates how a range of asylums in the first half of the nineteenth-century placed importance on inmates’ passive and active experiences of the natural landscape, and how the rural setting of asylums were expected to have a therapeutic and healing effect on inmates’ minds and bodies.

A systematic method of engaging with nature through gardening and caring for animals was implemented by the institution to promote inmates’ emotional development, as well as their sense of agency and belonging within the homes. As a morally restorative activity, the WSS promoted gardening as a means of eliciting a range of emotional responses in inmates, including love, kindness, nurture and care, which might help domesticate inmates within the institutional environment. In many homes, a small flowerbed was devoted to an individual child or small groups of inmates. These flowerbeds provided a means of leisure, but were integral to children’s citizenship training, teaching children basic horticultural skills that might be put to use later in farming and gardening jobs.

In other homes, children were given some agency and responsibility by using flowerbeds as kitchen gardens to grow vegetables and fruit for the home, thus contributing to the domestic economy of the institution. This imitated children’s roles within the biological family unit, where authority and responsibility were essential aspects of childhood experience, training and development. Inmates at the Arnold Grove Home chose to grow bush fruit in their flowerbeds to make jam in the summer months. The monthly magazines reported that the jams were particularly popular, selling out each year, and provided inmates with additional pocket money.

Activities such as gardening,

578 Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain*, p. 91.
579 Ibid., pp. 82–83.
which enabled children’s direct involvement with nature, were not only perceived by the Society to be morally restorative, but also functional in contributing to domestic economies and enhancing financial independence.

As a locus of moral and skills training, gardening activities enhanced inmates’ agency in their choice of what to grow, and allowed children to recognise the importance of values of independence and industriousness. It is likely that the Society considered this to be essential to the training of poor children, who might have learned the perceived feckless and idle behaviour of relatives who had previous guardianship over them. Training children to be industriousness and productive – the institution’s ultimate mission – helped to ensure that inmates would aspire to be self-reliant rather than welfare-recipient. In all likelihood, the Society hoped that such values would be propagated in inmates’ own families, thus changing inter-generational behaviours and helping to eliminate hereditary poverty. Gardening traditions also fitted into a wider context of nineteenth-century attitudes regarding the rational recreation of the poor, where engagement with nature was presented as a means of enhancing moral improvement.583 The institution therefore, positioned gardening as a similar means of education and social improvement for institutional residents.584

Gardening practices were also important for inmates in their social training. The necessity of having to work together in groups to care for small gardens served as a means of encouraging interaction between inmates, acts of co-operation and negotiation, as well as the formation of bonds and friendships with other inhabitants. It was these interpersonal relationships that the institution believed helped to strengthen children’s sense of belonging in the home, institutional family unit, and their ties to other co-residents. This basis of interaction and relationship building within the institution was vital to children’s social development and their ability to engage in society within a wider context


beyond the institution. The institution became an important, albeit manufactured site, where inmates learned through interactions with co-residents as imagined siblings the emotional and social dimensions of interpersonal relationships, attachment and belonging. Sibling or sibling-type relationships, whether real, lost or imagined, as Leonore Davidoff argues, formed as great a part of childhood experience as bonds to parents.  

In particular, for institutional inmates it was these bonds and series of interactions that taught them the meaning of social order, household power dynamics and family contract, the values of co-operation, trust, support, and the sharing of resources, as well as the dynamics of childhood friendships and rivalries.

The presence of animals within the institution was also a means of developing inmates’ affection and attachment, as well as teaching them the valuable lessons of responsibility and care, that were implicit duties of child rearing within the biological family unit. The Society believed that keeping pets would encourage positive emotional responses in children, by teaching them the, ‘many lessons which the care of some gentle, loveable animal would give’. The care of animals encouraged children to recognise the values of respect and humanity, as well as how to express compassion, kindness, affection and love.

It remains difficult, however, to ascertain how children responded to the responsibilities of caring for animals and pets within the institution. It is probable that even for those who may not have responded with much enthusiasm to the care of these animals, at the very least, pets provided some entertainment or distraction from the psychological unease of being separated from relatives and inhabiting an unfamiliar home. Becky Tipper’s research on children’s relationships with animals highlights that although these connections may at first glance seem explicable through a psycho-developmental lens, the importance of the social aspects of human-animal relationships is often overlooked. Her research demonstrates that in asking children to reflect on ‘who mattered’ to them, children were often eager to talk about their relationships with animals thus suggesting that they viewed their pets as social actors and family

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585 Davidoff, *Thicker than Water*, p. 32.
586 Ibid., pp. 29–49.
588 Tipper, ‘“A dog who I know quite well”’, p. 146.
participants in their own rights. This, she argues, shaped how children understood their relationships with animals in terms of kinship, ‘relatedness’ and as ‘part of the family’.

The representation of pets in a number of WSS home portraits highlights their importance to children and the position they assumed within the family. The deliberate inclusion of pets in photographs suggests that children’s sense of home/homeliness and the ways in which they defined ‘family’ included the pets they cared for, and thus indicates children’s fondness of and attachment to these animals. Inhabitants’ relationships with animals within WSS homes therefore, can be understood within the social context of children’s lives. Rather than merely a living creature that inhabited the same environment as WSS inhabitants, the photographing of animals suggests that children enjoyed personal, intimate and distinctive relationships with these pets. A photograph of a group of girls about to leave St Nicholas’ home to enter domestic service includes both their matron and their pet goat. The WSS home’s choice to include their pet in the photograph suggests that at the very least, the animal was supposed to be remembered as an unforgettable and integral part of home life (figure 32). Furthermore, the inclusion of these photographs in monthly magazines demonstrates the importance of affective dynamics and the notion of family togetherness in ‘last photographs of inhabitants. These photographs intended to shape lasting and last memories for WSS inhabitants, as well as highlight these practices to public audiences.

The photograph suggests too, that there is a sense of mischief in their pet – held and possibly controlled by the matron, the presence of the goat in the scene disrupts the intended message of the picture. Although dressed in their domestic service uniforms and holding trays of food in an attempt to communicate their would-be occupational status and best behaviour, the goat distracts the girls, who are smiling, stifling laughter and distracting their concentration. The sense of laughter and joking that the image portrays further reinforces a view of the potential of building close, playful and affectionate relationships with co-residents and carers through animals. Similarly, children’s responsibility for caring for their pet dog in St Mark’s home encouraged them to

\[589\] Ibid., pp. 145–165 [especially pp. 149–150].
\[590\] Ibid., p. 149. See also, Kete, *The Beast in the Boudoir.*
foster an affectionate relationship with the animal that resulted in its inclusion on trips away from the home and portraits of the home’s inhabitants (figure 33). Pet dogs within the institution were also aspirational symbols and could mirror the character of inhabitants - the ownership of a terrier, for example, communicated a sense of fun, activeness and energy present within the home. As other historians have argued, the dog was integral to the notion of bourgeois domesticity and home. Pet dogs within the institution were also aspirational symbols and could mirror the character of inhabitants - the ownership of a terrier, for example, communicated a sense of fun, activeness and energy present within the home. As other historians have argued, the dog was integral to the notion of bourgeois domesticity and home. Moreover, ownership and care of animals taught children important lessons about parenting, responsibility and obligation.

FIGURE 32. St Nicholas’ girls, Pyrford, c. 1915

*From HLR archive*

FIGURE 33. A group photograph of St Mark’s annual trip, c. 1918

*From HLR archive*

Although photographs suggest that children considered pets to be ‘family’ members, pets also taught children valuable lessons about domesticity, family and responsibility. The care of pets had significant implications for poorer children, particularly girls, in providing them with a domestic education that centred on infant care training. The rituals of caring for animals helped to develop understanding of motherhood and maternal attitudes, which in many cases, institutional staff noted that poor mothers appeared to lack.592 Such training guided children to recognise their future responsibilities as parents to raise and nurture their children independently.

One magazine article reinforces this idea, suggesting the greater value in teaching children to care for animals: ‘better to teach half-a-dozen little boys to love a dog or a horse, than to subscribe money for the prosecution of those who ignorantly torture them’.593 This statement implies the Society’s assumption that poorer children were incapable of expressing sentiments of care and love. It also implies that these children might naturally be inclined to abuse the creatures they assumed responsibility for, particularly if they had previously experienced cruel treatment or neglect. ‘Prevention’, the Society confirmed, was ‘the better cure’ than wasting resources on resolving welfare problems.594

Moreover, the statement was also a dig at those individuals who donated to the RSPCA instead of children’s charities, suggesting that a moral hierarchy of charity existed and that supporters should donate accordingly.595 Thus, teaching children to care for these animals not only developed their skills to nurture, but also ensured that these children were able to care for their families in the future and become less likely to neglect or abuse their own offspring.

Conclusion

This chapter has identified a set of ideals and practices promoted by the WSS that sought to provide inmates with personalised care and attention to nurture their individuality and enhance their self-worth and identity. WSS fundraising

592 ‘Cameos from life–worse than motherless’, Our Waifs and Strays (July, 1905), p. 120.
594 Ibid.
595 Milton, Taking the Pledge, pp. 119–211.
literature demonstrates that this set of ideals and practices included giving children treats, as well as other rituals that centred on familial togetherness, such as holidays and other celebrations. These practices offered inmates reprieve from daily institutional routines, allowing the opportunity to experience the Society’s notion of ideal family time. These occasions and events intended to provide inmates with pleasure, fun, as well as a sense of cohesiveness and belonging within the collective ‘family’. Such practices aimed to help children forge fond memories of care, and a sense of unity and belonging with co-residents and carers.

In drawing attention to the institution’s ideals of treating inmates, the chapter highlights the need to move away from traditional views of the institution as bleak, oppressive and uncaring, with very little consideration given to the emotional development of inmates and creation of positive experiences of residential care. Yet, it is important to recognise that at times, there could be a disconnect between ideals and practice. It is also vital to acknowledge, as chapter three has demonstrated, that practices such as treating children had disciplinary potential, helping staff display power and authority in the homes. Treats, rewards and other privileges were fundamental elements in establishing ideal behaviours and boundaries of conduct within the home in terms of social interaction and interpersonal relationships, which was not unlike the use and meaning of treats as disciplinary aids within the natural familial setting. Staff members’ decisions to treat children would have been conditional on the demonstration of their good behaviour. Deviation from prescribed norms or other house rules often resulted in the withholding of treats or other luxuries that were supplementary to usual daily life. Few punishment records survive for the institution, but those that do, indicate that a popular form of discipline was to exclude children from certain privileges, such as pudding, cake or playtime.

596 See Miller, A Theory of Shopping, p. 150–152, 173. See also Marcel Mauss, The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies (New York, 1967). Mauss posits that gifts can be interpreted as not merely an exchange of goods of economic value, but also an exchange of courtesies, behaviours, rituals, obligations and contracts. Thus, as Miller suggests, the meaning of treats lie in their potential to develop personal and social values, as well as to condemn or diminish the value of certain actions or conduct.

597 Punishment book, Hunstanton Home, 1897-1899. In 1899, E Viney was kept from going out on Saturday afternoon with the other boys and received no pudding or cake on
The chapter has argued that treats and family time promoted individuality, personalised care and attention, as well as enhancing a sense of collective unity and belonging, and should not be seen as separate to institutional aims to reform and train children. Instead, these nurturing practices should be acknowledged as intrinsic to inmates’ training and ultimately intended to achieve the same outcome in reform. Individual care, attention and treats functioned as a positive, rewarding and incentivised systems to encourage inmates to conform to expectations regarding conduct as well as other home regulations. In adopting systems of encouragement, rewards and kindness over more punitive and disciplinary processes, the Society sought to enhance children’s feelings of attachment and connection with co-residents and staff.

The ways in which the Society imagined children would respond to these practices, as well how inmates responded in reality, are examined in the next chapter through the lens of aftercare. In particular, chapter five offers greater insight into what the Society aspired to and what they appear to have achieved in seeking to foster positive interpersonal relationships within the institution. Examination of how the Society represented mechanisms of continued contact and aftercare in monthly magazines offers some understanding of how the Society directed readers’ responses to children’s experiences and relationships with institutional staff members. Sentimental images of aftercare, the chapter argues, helped to promote ideological values of nurture, affect, and attachment for a public audience of supporters. Finally, examination of case file correspondence advances understandings of how far children created and maintained contact with staff and highlights the range of responses that the Society’s care elicited in its recipients.

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Sunday because he was found playing in the bedroom and had carried out his task of bed-making in a slovenly way.
CHAPTER FIVE

Enduring relationships?

Aftercare and interpersonal relationships beyond the institution

The preceding chapters have examined children’s experiences of home, family, and belonging within the Waifs and Strays Society as a means to recover the interpersonal and domestic history of institutional life and welfare provision. This chapter now examines how ideologies focussing on children’s care and wellbeing remained lasting concerns for welfare organisations beyond inmates’ confinement within the institution. The study of history from below has increased interest in the lives of welfare recipients.\textsuperscript{598} Research, for example, has examined welfare recipients’ trajectories prior to institutional confinement. Such scholarship has also had important implications in revising understandings of the role and agency of poor families in negotiating assistance to overcome life-cycle stresses and survive periods of hardship.\textsuperscript{599}

Yet the study of inmates’ lives following their discharge, along with institutional practices implemented to ensure children’s longer-term welfare has been largely unexplored by historians. Research that has explored the lives of discharged inmates has focussed primarily on the types of employment children gained, rather than their experiences of life after care. Murdoch argues that Barnardo’s training programmes were based on ideals of citizenship that ultimately prepared children for professions ill suited to the industrial economy.\textsuperscript{600} Other scholars confirm that low-paid and taxing employment


\textsuperscript{600} Murdoch, \textit{Imagined Orphans}, p. 121.
restricted quality of life for many inmates and probably perpetuated cycles of
dependency and impoverishment for other generations. Similarly, the
experiences of children who emigrated from institutions have been presented as
‘journeys into the unknown’ with little contact or support, characterised by social
and emotional trauma.

By evaluating issues of reform, training and citizenship as the primary
elements that underpinned institutional childcare, historians have often equated
institutional mechanisms of ‘aftercare’ – the processes involved in maintaining
contact with and ensuring children’s wellbeing following discharge – with
employment. Scholarship has characterised institutional aftercare processes as
inadequate support systems for those leaving care: limited to irregular visits and
inspections that sought to monitor children’s performance in employment. Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel have suggested that attempts to provide
meaningful support to care leavers were largely non-existent and that many felt
an overwhelming sense of abandonment when they went out into the wider
world. Such critiques contribute to views of welfare provision as short-term,
with little care and support given following departure.

Indeed, the issue of aftercare for care leavers from foster families,
refuges, custody and probation is still well debated today. Young people at risk,
including care leavers, ex-offenders and those at risk of offending feature
prominently in statistics for homeless single people across England. Over 30%
of homeless people have been in care. The research and campaigning efforts of a number of charities dedicated to supporting the needs of those in care and care leavers show that their movement from supported to unsupported living, their ‘pathway’ plans for independence, and their reunification with biological family are poorly planned and need improvement. Policy recommendations show there is still a need by service providers to show young care leavers that the door to support is left ajar not slammed shut.

Given that the mission and ideals of many welfare institutions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries centred on creating homely sites and familial models of care to ensure inmates’ emotional development, it is surprising that institutions have been presented as caring little about the futures of the inmates in whom they had invested. The trend of focussing on reform, training and citizenship as institutional ideals has obscured opportunities to examine the more complex and subtle nature of aftercare systems implemented by institutions beyond customary follow-up inspections of discharged inmates.

While many organisations may not have had adequate staff, time or resources to effectively ensure the well being of each and every child, Helen Rogers has drawn attention to the sustained communication between prison visitor Sarah Martin and discharged prisoners. This contact functioned as a means of articulating personal interest in wellbeing of these individuals. Such acts can be interpreted on a basic level as a process of aftercare, that is, the act of ‘caring’ for and about individuals following their discharge from institutions. Although the practice of maintaining communication could be complex, with much depending on the personalities involved, this chapter argues that WSS institutional staff and inmates, like Sarah Martin and her discharged prisoners, also sought to maintain forms of contact after discharge.

This final chapter examines WSS ideals and practices of aftercare broadly between the 1880s and into the mid-twentieth century, instead of concentrating exclusively on the employment, training and economic survival of former

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607 Ibid.
inmates.\textsuperscript{609} Given the emphasis placed on ideologies of family, home and belonging in a range of WSS childcare practices, the chapter examines their ideals and practices that constituted ‘aftercare’ and contact beyond institutional walls as presented in institutional magazines. It is important to note that aftercare was rudimentary by today’s standards. Even in idealised form, WSS aftercare practices rarely went beyond inspections, informal systems of correspondence or visits to and from former residents. Yet examination of these ideals and practices is significant in highlighting that, instead of the image of the uncaring institution, welfare institutions such as the WSS were well aware of their need to support children emotionally, financially and materially, long after discharge to ensure their longer-term economic and emotional wellbeing. Furthermore, by examining surviving archival evidence, including letters sent back to the institution by former inmates, the chapter will assess the gap between what the institution aspired to and what they appear to have achieved.

The public presentation of lasting contact and enduring bonds with children was vital in legitimising the Society’s successful provision of childcare and their longer-term interest in children’s wellbeing. Examination of how the Society represented aftercare mechanisms in monthly magazines highlights how they measured success and directed readers to imagine children’s responses to childcare practices and relationships with institutional staff. Sentimental images of aftercare, the chapter argues, helped to promote ideological values of attachment, kindness and nurture for a public audience of supporters. Finally, examination of case-file correspondence advances understandings of how far children created and maintained contact with staff and demonstrates the range of responses that the Society’s care elicited in its recipients.

**Ideals of contact with former inmates**

For many WSS inmates, especially those who had spent much of their childhood in care, discharge from the institutional home could mark a difficult transition in

\textsuperscript{609} In the study of aftercare, I have limited my analysis to children admitted to the institution up to 1914: aftercare provided to some inmates extends into the 1960s. Greater comparative study of WSS aftercare over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries might reveal significant changes in the administrative processes in the mid-twentieth century, however, this is beyond the scope of this thesis. I have endeavoured to highlight changes in aftercare processes as the case file sample has highlighted.
economical, physical and emotional terms. Whilst some children returned to the network of friends and relatives from which they had come, many inmates were sent out into the world ‘alone’, into employment secured on their behalf by WSS staff. As chapter two highlighted, whilst the Society seldom prohibited children’s contact with relatives, maintaining relationships with parents and other relatives was not always possible for various reasons. However, the WSS sought to employ a range of mechanisms that might ensure that discharged inmates were not entirely without support, aid or friends to call upon. These systems, the Society stated in their monthly fundraising magazine, demonstrated their commitment to ‘support children for as long as they needed’, and highlighted their belief in their duty to continue caring for and about inmates following discharge.

In one magazine, the Society asked: ‘What is, and what should be, our relationship towards these grown-up boys and girls of ours?’ Whilst the ‘training, love and a good send-off’ might have been viewed as sufficient by some reformers, the Society argued that the ‘ideal home and friend of youth’ provided to children must not ‘be cast off like the skin of a snake’. Instead, the Society demanded its representatives create ‘true friendship’ with children that was ‘deep and lasting’ in nature. Whilst historians of residential welfare have presented aftercare mechanisms as limited in scope, with little physical, financial or emotional support, this statement suggests that WSS ideals of aftercare centred on retaining contact with inmates in order to provide emotional support by continuing to try to foster a sense of attachment and belonging. The Society presented the concept of aftercare not merely as an extension of their control and management of children beyond the institution, but as a system of communication, with social and emotional support to offer inmates friendship and belonging in the broader life cycle.

Inspections and follow-up visits remained an integral aspect of the Society’s aftercare, particularly for emigrated children sent to WSS receiving

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610 See Chapter 2, pp. 81–91.
homes in Sherbrooke, Canada before being placed in service. As Parr argues, Canadian legislation required voluntary organisations to inspect children in their first year of employment.\(^{614}\) The quality of regularity of aftercare following this period was not stipulated. As such, WSS aftercare reports fulfilled the expectation of care. Case files demonstrate that inspection took place during the first year of children’s employment as a minimum.

Like many other welfare organisations, children’s emigration was a common practice implemented to separate children from ‘undesirable’ relatives, or for those ‘friendless’ children with no known or surviving relatives.\(^{615}\) Emigration also allowed the institution to redistribute the surplus population of ‘unwanted’ pauper children and alleviate demand on their resources.\(^{616}\) WSS records suggest that follow-up visits usually occurred during the first year of children’s placement in employment, and records demonstrate that some children were inspected annually for several years after their emigration. This is likely to have been dependent on children remaining in the same situation and the Society not having lost sight of them.\(^{617}\) The Society appointed lady visitors, usually members of the Society’s Homes Committee in Canada, to inspect children placed in situations abroad.\(^{618}\)

Historians of maternalism and welfare provision have drawn attention to the lady visitor as a common figure responsible for numerous aspects associated with the provision of care in nineteenth-century welfare work.\(^{619}\) These roles included distinguishing between the deserving and undeserving poor for welfare organisations, representing narratives of poverty, morality and character of the poor to a reading public, and regulating welfare recipients’ behaviour and


\(^{617}\) See case files: 9383; 14985; 15019; 15323.

\(^{618}\) See case files: 9440; 9658; 11023; 11026; 15009; 18347.

character following their discharge.\textsuperscript{620} Within the context of child welfare, Murdoch argues that lady visitors and other types of inspectors were tasked with attempting to restrict parent-child contact after discharge.\textsuperscript{621} These inspections alone were insufficient in ensuring the wellbeing of children and, in practice, did little to prevent children’s contact with ‘undesirable’ influences.\textsuperscript{622}

WSS follow-up reports suggest that, like the practices of other institutions, inspections sought to measure youths’ conduct and progress. Although children were interviewed, little status or value seems to have been attached to their views and remarks on their conditions of employment. Children’s accounts were usually short, and either positive or ambivalent in tone, confirming Frost’s conclusion that children were unlikely to have complained during inspection.\textsuperscript{623} Mary S who emigrated in 1906 at the age of 14, was visited by a WSS official on the farm where she lived and worked. Her employer’s report stated that although Mary had not been with them long, she appeared to be quite contented and happy.\textsuperscript{624} Although her employers noted she was ‘very forgetful’, they hoped she would improve in this respect. Meanwhile, Mary stated: ‘I am getting on alright and I like my place pretty well’.\textsuperscript{625} The brevity of her statement alongside her ambivalent language possibly indicates her reluctance to convey her true feelings about her placement.

Most WSS inspections took place at the employer’s home and as such, children were probably disinclined to complain about perceived ill treatment in close proximity to employers. Children may have feared that complaints would cause differential treatment from employers, such as the denial of privileges. Children’s unfamiliarity with inspectors may also have prevented them from complaining. Fear of castigation or reproach both from employers and the institution, as well as the possibility of not being believed, could have constrained children from presenting their true feelings about their situations.

\textsuperscript{620} See especially, Livesey, ’Reading for Character’, p. 43–67.
\textsuperscript{621} Murdoch, \textit{Imagined Orphans}, p.118.
\textsuperscript{623} Frost, \textit{Victorian Childhoods}, p. 148.
\textsuperscript{624} Case file 11029, Lady visitor’s report, 18/6/1909.
\textsuperscript{625} Ibid.
In her study of domestic service, Delap has drawn attention to the dislike and ambiguous emotions felt by many young women who entered service.\textsuperscript{626} Meanwhile, Francois Barret-Ducrocq’s research describes the painful working conditions which were worsened by ‘desperate boredom of solitude and monotonous labour’.\textsuperscript{627} Her research also highlights the exploitation and abuse that many domestic servants faced.\textsuperscript{628} It is likely that many of the children that entered service from WSS care felt similar emotions and encountered exploitation and abuse. Such feelings were probably only expressed amongst children’s friends and relatives and as such, little archival evidence survives to provide a true depiction about their feelings towards their employment.

Children such as Lucy B, however, did express unhappiness to WSS inspectors. Three months after emigrating to Canada at the age of 17 in 1909, Lucy stated ‘I am doing alright but I am so lonely here’. This statement supports historians’ conclusions that emigration was often a lonely, isolating experience.\textsuperscript{629} Her ambivalent language suggested her indifference to her work, which emphasised the desperation of her complaint of isolation. Her response also highlighted her efforts to settle in her position. She further stated, ‘I would like to go out more often and then I should feel happier but tell Miss Bailey I am trying to be a good girl’.\textsuperscript{630}

That Lucy wished to reassure her former matron and ask for recognition of her progress implies a connection with the matron, a desire to be remembered, and a belief that news of her conduct would be welcomed. In seeking to exercise her own agency and her belief in fulfilling her part of the contract, Lucy hoped to negotiate further privileges by suggesting that going out more would provide a solution to her loneliness. While her statements indicated some esteem for her matron, they also indicate her attempt to signal her dissatisfaction with lack of freedom and loneliness in her situation.

No records survive to suggest that the Society tried to resolve Lucy’s feelings of loneliness. Her statement, however, demonstrates that the WSS expected children to do well and get on in life following discharge, whilst those

\textsuperscript{626} Delap, \textit{Knowing their Place}, pp. 44–46, 239–240.
\textsuperscript{628} Ibid., pp. 94–97.
\textsuperscript{630} Case file 11023, Lady visitor’s report, 29/8/1907.
who felt unhappy, unsettled or encountered difficulties might be viewed as burdensome or even ungrateful. Lucy’s remarks reveal, that despite feeling anxious to be perceived as successful in her position, her loneliness was overwhelming enough for her to articulate it to staff. However, her mitigation of her feelings in order to be identified as a ‘good girl’ as well as being brave and resolute in her attempts to do well despite her unhappiness, indicates that she believed the WSS might only help her if they recognised her to be a model employee.

Other case files highlight that when children were unhappy or abused in situations, they resorted to alternative measures to resolve the situation. Children’s actions highlight their agency in many cases, as well as their rejection of the Society in times of need or hardship. Some children simply left their positions, as records suggest Maud C did, after being placed in service in Canada. It is not known whether Maud encountered difficulties in her employment, but she left her position within a year of placement and was lost sight of by the Society despite attempts to trace her. Annual visits did not prevent the ill treatment of some children, and consequently other children turned to friends they trusted for assistance. In 1914, Hilda W ran away from her place in service in Canada to a friend, Mrs. Clark, who took charge of her and telephoned the Society’s home in Niagara. The Society immediately intervened in the matter, sending a WSS representative, Mr Mackham, to investigate and offer support. His report stated:

…apparently Hilda’s offence had been stealing some jam and for this she had been severely beaten. No complaint of any kind has ever been received about Hilda and I am most deeply indignant about the matter.

Mr Mackham’s resentment regarding the accusations against Hilda suggests that he was acquainted with the girl or at the very least, aware of her record and behaviour. His statement further suggests that he trusted Hilda’s word and was wounded by the severity of the situation. The case file suggests that Hilda spent

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631 Case file 14985, see case note, 6/12/1914.
632 Case file 14987, letter from Our Western Home to Rudolf, 20/12/1914.
633 Case file 14987, letter from Mr Mackham to Rudolf, December 1914.
some weeks recovering from her injuries and nervous shock, before being placed in service elsewhere in February 1915 by the Society’s Canadian branch.\footnote{Case file 14987, see case note, 19/2/1915.}

Despite attempts to provide a consistent level of aftercare to children who had emigrated to Canada, irregular inspections in all likelihood, did little to provide a firm sense of the Society’s continued interest in and the support of former inmates. Lady visitor’s reports from Canada suggest that inspections functioned only to mediate relationships between children and employers and ensure that both parties were satisfied with the arrangements in place. In some cases, visits may well have ensured that children were not mistreated. For others, case files highlight that inspections did little to quash feelings of loneliness, unhappiness and dissatisfaction. It is likely such visits did little to prevent the exploitation and abuse of children. As Delap argues, for those leaving institutional care, entering service could feel like an ‘abrupt ejection’ and that without the support and protection of either relatives or institutional staff, some care leavers assumed very vulnerable positions in the labour market.\footnote{Delap, Knowing their Place, pp. 33–34.}

It would be inaccurate, however, to assume that inspections alone functioned as a useful marker in thinking about how much welfare organisations continued to care about former inmates. Although customarily implemented for emigrated children, inspections appear to have been undertaken less frequently for individuals entering employment in Britain. The decision not to implement regular inspections of children employed in Britain may have been in part due to the lack of statutory regulations to provide follow-up support. Furthermore, lack of resources in terms of staffing and finance, probably inhibited the institution from undertaking regular follow-up visits for all discharged inmates. Instead, children’s enrolment in WSS membership leagues sought to encourage their continued contact with institutional staff as well as co-residents. These schemes intended to provide children with some sense of belonging to the institutional family.

Children placed in situations across the UK received a certificate of membership to the Old Boys’ or Old Girls’ Leagues. The leagues served as a model of aftercare that centred on continued contact between the institution and child. Upon enrolment, children also received a welcome letter from ‘Uncle
Edward’, the Society’s founder. The seemingly personalised letter sent to children, that used a direct, approachable and familial term to address Edward Rudolf, urged them to write back to the institution with their news. They were also offered rewards that encouraged them to be successful and independent model citizens to positively reflect WSS care. The institution sent former inmates a copy of Rudolf’s portrait as a prize if they kept their place in employment for over a year. This practice intended to serve as a mechanism that encouraged children to reminisce and laugh about their time in care and to get in touch with their former carers. The portrait might also elicit other responses by encouraging children to appreciate where they were now, to feel grateful for the help they received in moving on in their lives, or to wish they were back in the institution.636

It is difficult to ascertain whether such practices were also established for emigrated children, but magazines suggest that they were also encouraged to write back to WSS staff. Practices that encouraged continued contact, and personally identified, praised and recognised children doing well most likely contributed to children’s sense of achievement.637 These incentives and rewards also served as symbols of the Society’s pride and interest in former inmates. In addition, these practices confirmed WSS authority over children, and it is probable that these systems of reward intended to inspire old boys and girls to do their best following discharge.

Other leagues established by the institution that operated primarily to raise funds for the Society’s work, offered a further avenue for old boys and girls to stay in contact with the Society. The Guild of Gratitude was set up in 1901 for old boys and girls who wished to contribute a small donation as a material expression of gratitude to the institution and the care it had provided.638 The Happy Birthday League encouraged both public supporters and former inmates

637 See magazine features such as ‘Our Post Bag’ which included letters from former inmates. ‘Our Post Bag’, Our Waifs and Strays, (June, 1904), pp. 318–329; ‘Post Bag’, Our Waifs and Strays (July, 1905), pp. 118–120.
the opportunity to pledge one shilling to the Society on their birthday.\textsuperscript{639} Although such membership leagues promoted former inmates’ continued contact with the institution, their purpose to generate additional funding must be taken into account when assessing the Society’s enthusiasm for keeping in touch.

Guilds and leagues that offered former inmates the opportunity to donate to the Society’s work also provided them with the opportunity to express agency, status and benevolence. Their ability to assume a role as patron could be particularly empowering. Furthermore, these opportunities were designed to reflect the transformative experience of the Society’s care: former welfare recipients could demonstrate that the Society’s ideologies of compassion were acknowledged and practiced by those who had benefitted from WSS benevolence. Indeed, institutional literature produced for the public that claimed former inmates contributed to these guilds legitimised the Society’s apparent success in transforming ‘street arabs’ into productive, valuable and sympathetic citizens who were no longer perceived as a threat to society.\textsuperscript{640}

Given the greater number of children entering employment in the UK than in Canada, it is likely that the Society considered membership leagues the most efficient way in which to keep in touch with former inmates. It appears that membership leagues functioned as the primary model of aftercare, since official systems of inspection would have required substantial financial and administrative resources in order for its effective implementation in the U.K. However, inspections were not abandoned completely in Britain. The case file below demonstrates that matrons and masters carried out some inspections, although visits appear to have been relatively informal compared to those conducted in Canada.

Matrons and masters conducted follow-up visits: the ad-hoc nature of these inspections offers some confirmation that the availability of funds and staff to establish official inspection systems in Britain was limited. Moreover, it is probable that inspections could only occur when children were employed locally.


to the institutional home: matrons and masters were unlikely to have visited inmates who moved a great distance upon their discharge. John F’s former master Mr. Griffin paid a surprise visit to the farm where he was employed in 1916, close to the institutional home in Suffolk. Records do not suggest whether specific concern about the boy prompted his inspection but after visiting John, Griffin wrote to Rudolf to suggest his removal. The letter reported his dissatisfaction that John was working unsupervised alongside an ‘undesirable’ companion, and that by having to undertake the foreman’s workload he was being exploited.641 John returned to his former institutional home two days after the inspection and was found another situation.642

Other case files suggest that by 1915, a WSS staff member named Miss Taylor had assumed responsibility for inspecting children in service in the U.K. Whether she was the only staff inspector tasked with this role is difficult to ascertain: the case file sample used here does not reveal the identity of any additional inspector, although it is possible that the reports of other inspectors may have been filed elsewhere or have not survived. If Miss Taylor was the only inspector during this period, it is unlikely that she would have been able to visit all former inmates across the country. Indeed, that John F’s master visited him in 1916 – following Miss Taylor’s appointment – suggests that other staff members were still expected to follow-up with former inmates. Yet with seemingly few robust or standardised methods of capturing such data for all children leaving institutional care, it is impossible to know whether all children placed in employment by the Society were inspected, by whom and how regularly inspections were carried out.

It is perhaps surprising that the WSS adopted an inspection system for discharged children so long after their foundation, given that reformers such as Louisa Twining and Jane Nassau Senior had recommended the employment of qualified inspectors and lady visitors to protect care leavers since the 1870s.643 Inspectors for children boarded out with foster parents had been appointed from

641 Case file 18357, letter from W.H. Griffin to Rudolf, 10/12/1916.
642 Case file 18357, case notes 12/12/1916 and 13/12/1916.
the start of the Society’s work.644 It remains unknown why Miss Taylor was appointed around this time. It is possible that the establishment of a more formal system of inspection reflected the greater recognition of children’s rights and shifting practices during the early twentieth century that sought to prevent the cruelty and exploitation of children. These changes were embodied in policies such as *The Children Act of 1908* and the statutory powers given to the NSPCC to facilitate family intervention.645 Nevertheless, case files suggest that children’s inspection was a central concern to the institution from its foundation, and that staff assumed this task on an ad hoc basis alongside numerous other responsibilities. It is probable therefore, that with greater funds and resources, as well as the desire to ensure the institution appeared to be doing all it could to ensure the wellbeing of their former inmates, the Society created a new position to fulfil this role.

Following Miss Taylor’s appointment, case files demonstrate that aftercare provision and follow up inspection became more standardised. Ivy L’s case file demonstrates that upon leaving care in 1919 she was regularly inspected by Miss Taylor as she frequently changed employment and had established a familiar relationship with the inspector. It is unlikely that Ivy would have had much contact with Taylor whilst residing in the institution and rather, their friendship was probably established as a result of Ivy’s regular inspection. Ivy’s letters between 1919 and 1924 suggest that she was receptive to maintaining a relationship with the inspector and endeavoured to keep in touch with her for some time. It is possible that Ivy felt some obligation to allow Miss Taylor to do her job and that she accepted that she would be inspected, since she probably had little choice.

Upon leaving one of her situations, she wrote to Miss Taylor to thank her for her ‘goodness and trouble in coming to see me’ and expressed hope that she would ‘still continue to visit’ at her new place of employment.646 Her subsequent letter, however, informed Miss Taylor that she was not able to receive visitors in her new position, but in an attempt to maintain a relationship, she stated that

646 Case file 18352, Letter from Ivy L to Miss Taylor, February 1923.
'although I will not be able to see you, I can write from time to time, and when I leave here…then, of course, I shall love you to come as often as possible’.\textsuperscript{647} The fact that Ivy was not permitted visitors in her new role suggests that her new employers did not consider Miss Taylor’s visits vital or necessary, and demonstrates how other forces could interfere or prevent the implementation of aftercare models.

Ivy’s letters to Miss Taylor were formal and respectful in tone and language, and while they do not suggest familiarity or attachment between Ivy and the inspector, they do demonstrate Ivy’s attempts to keep in contact. Continued contact with the inspector most likely demonstrated Ivy’s attempts to keep her options open and making sure that Miss Taylor remained ‘on side’. That no agreement was made by Ivy’s employers for regular inspection meant that Ivy’s initiative to maintain contact with Miss Taylor was all the more important. Her attempts to keep in contact demonstrate former inmates’ agency and awareness of the benefits of maintaining contact for advocacy and to retain bonds of familiarity in a changing and potentially unstable world. Moreover, her actions highlight how aftercare systems illustrate a two-way process for some inmates, which involved the Society checking up on inmates, as well as youths initiating contact for their own reasons. Ivy most likely recognised the benefits of developing a relationship with an advocate from a different background and social position to help her navigate any difficulties she encountered.

Basic systems of inspection appear to have only been implemented for children who entered employment following their discharge from the institution. For those who were prematurely removed from care or returned to their relatives, case files suggest that the Society no longer assumed responsibility for ensuring their welfare. However, relatives requesting to remove their children from care were subject to an initial inspection of their home and circumstances undertaken by a WSS agent in order to facilitate children’s return. In addition, the Society required a letter of recommendation in support of their application from relatives’ local clergyman. Follow-up visits do not appear to have been conducted as a common practice both prior to and after the appointment of the inspector for discharged inmates.

\textsuperscript{647} Ibid., April 1923.
In some cases, the institution requested that the local clergyman in the family’s parish take responsibility for overseeing the child’s ‘moral and spiritual welfare’. This measure, however, appears to have been adopted infrequently in the case file sample and perhaps was only implemented when the Society was concerned about the wellbeing of the child. That this practice was infrequent may suggest the Society’s reluctance to devolve their responsibility to non-WSS affiliated individuals. It is probable that the Society was apprehensive about relying on the goodwill of clergymen who possessed minimal expertise or knowledge about the Society’s beliefs of what constituted ideal care for their charges. With clergymen’s lack of knowledge and training about aftercare ideals, the institution may have recognised the impact this practice would have had on the quality, consistency and assurance of ensuring children’s longer-term welfare.

Moreover, the effectiveness of this model is contentious. Few records indicate the extent to which clergymen fulfilled this duty: responses from clergymen agreeing to this responsibility are few and the reports clergymen submitted even more limited in number. It is likely that without the Society’s establishment of a rigid system of ensuring this mechanism of aftercare was undertaken, in practice, this model of support failed many children. Lily P, returned to her relatives in October 1916 and Rudolf wrote to her local clergyman to request he ensure her wellbeing. Six months following her discharge, the institution received a report from Reverend Longden, confirming that she was ‘in good hands, has been confirmed and is a regular communicant’.

When clergymen did assume responsibility for overseeing the wellbeing of former institutional inmates, it is unclear how effective this system was. Whilst Rev Longden confirmed that he saw Lily regularly, the character of these exchanges are indeterminable and the power dynamics between a clergyman,

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648 See case files 18360; 18347; 11032.
650 Case file 18347, letter from Rev. J.S. Longden, April 1917.
651 Ibid.
however affable, and a working-class child were skewed against the sharing of confidences. Furthermore, there seem to have been few standards established by the Society that guided clergymen as to the expectations associated with this role, and thus, quality and level of care provided to former inmates was probably highly variable.

Regardless of how effective this system of aftercare was, the practice indicates that the institution wished to extend their authority and surveillance over former inmates who returned home. The desire to do so may have been considered more pressing for inmates who returned to apparently ‘problematic’ relatives. This type of surveillance over children may indeed have been considered oppressive and controlling by some families. It is possible that some inmates sought to distance themselves early on from practices designed to monitor conduct and behaviour. Yet, whilst this type of ‘care’, was not necessarily affective in character, it demonstrated the Society’s understanding of its obligations and responsibility over the children it had raised, even into their adulthood. Moreover, practices of inspection and support also demonstrates the powerful network of support that the Society had generated within the Church of England community following the Archbishop of Canterbury’s acceptance of the presidency of the Society in 1881. In doing so, the WSS gained support from members of the Anglican clergy, enabling the church to embed itself in developing childcare debates and practices.

Contact with the institution: representations of enduring bonds

The Society’s early models of aftercare can be viewed as basic or inadequate, especially when measured against present-day welfare practices. Analysis of

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653 A number of practices have been implemented in local and national policy recently that aim to provide more consistent and standardised support to the 10,000 young people leaving care in England each year. These policies and practices acknowledge that not all young people leaving care, unlike their peers, have networks of support outside their local authority. These include initiatives such as the introduction of Junior Individual Savings Accounts (JISA) in 2012 and Setting Up Home Allowances. More rigorous regulations and guidance for the support of care leavers has been embodied in a range of other policies and practices that seek to promote best practice amongst Local Authority provision, including: the Department for Education (DfE) *Transitions to Adulthood*, DfE’s *Care Leavers Charter* (2012), the Care Leaver’s Foundation’s *New Belongings* project and the Centre for Social Action’s research and policy recommendations about
WSS practices, in many cases, highlights the shortcomings associated with irregular inspection, inadequate and delayed intervention in cases of abuse and unhappiness as well as lack of financial or material assistance for struggling children. Yet, systems of ensuring children’s wellbeing in the wider world were represented in a different light by the Society in their monthly magazines.

Whilst ideologies of home, family, and belonging shaped WSS practices, like many other welfare organisations, objectives to transform children into productive, industrious and moral citizens remained deeply rooted at the heart of their work. Scholarship has drawn attention to the ways in which welfare organisations used fundraising literature to represent inmates’ transformation from ‘street arabs’ to ‘proper’ citizens. The Society similarly presented children’s reformation in care in a range of magazine articles and positioned these subjects as credits to their work and symbols of WSS pride. Expectations for inmates to prove ‘a credit’ to the institution also had significant presence in case file correspondence between staff and former inmates.

One article in *Our Waifs and Strays* entitled, ‘Serving their Country’, presented a group of children from the Tattenhall Home as exemplary citizens, publishing their letters back to their former master Mr Hicks. The article stated that ‘we take a great pride in our little soldiers’, and encouraged readers to do the same when reading the letters and looking at the portraits. The article suggests, as Murdoch argues, that institutional ideals of children’s reform were bound up with notions of citizenship and an increasing focus on the imperial context by the end of the nineteenth century. The propaganda value of the article is also significant as it provided an important platform through which the Society was able to proclaim their objectives, legitimise their work and make bold claims of their successes.
Importantly, such magazine articles draw attention to the ways in which the Society promoted the idea, language and mechanisms of contact with children. These narratives embody WSS expressions of pride in former inmates and support the idea that institutional staff developed some degree of connection and fondness to the children for whom they were responsible. The article argued that ‘nothing shows more clearly the affectionate relations between Mr and Mrs Hicks and their young charges than the “Dear Father” “Dear Mother” with which the letters begin’. Letters published in the article also represented children’s attempts keep in contact and be remembered: one boy, the article stated, spent his Christmas leave back visiting the Tattenhall Home, whilst other boys sent their photographs back to their former carers. Other letters suggest that Christmas cards were sent between boys and staff.658

Other articles in the magazine aimed to showcase the strength of interpersonal relationships between staff and children, and children’s success in the wider world. Articles that centred on children’s progress promoted the notion that WSS carers felt a sense of pride and attachment for former inmates. One article stated that a foster mother, who had retained a close relationship with a former inmate, wrote to the Society to express her pride in him by enclosing a recent photograph of the boy dressed in his soldier’s uniform. The article does not mention how often the boy wrote to his former foster mother, but sending his photograph to her before going to war suggests his desire to be remembered. That correspondence existed outside the Society’s remit – between foster parents and youths – also demonstrates that less formal mechanisms of keeping in contact and offering support existed alongside more formalised systems implemented by the Society. This photograph was reproduced in the monthly magazine alongside an account of his case history. The WSS also articulated their pride in the child’s progress, stating that the boy and his brother who were admitted together, ‘we are pleased to say, have turned out well, and have proved a credit to themselves and the Society’.659

Illustrations and photographs depicting children were frequently used devices in the magazine that promoted the Society’s interest in former inmates. In March 1904, the magazine published a series of photographs of girls who had

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emigrated to Canada. The Society congratulated the girls for ‘remaining steady’ in employment by holding the same positions in service for a number of years.\textsuperscript{660} As propaganda pieces, the publication of vignettes, case histories and news of former inmates provided readers with evidence of the Society’s triumph in creating hard-working boys and girls. Meanwhile, Ethel D. became the focus of the Society’s pride for having held her place in service for over five years. Her position as a servant, the article stated, also extended beyond a paid employee of the household. Instead, Ethel was depicted as part of the family. The Society claimed that ‘as a daughter’ she had ‘proved herself a great comfort to her adopted parents’.\textsuperscript{661} Statements such as this made claim to the affective relationships established between children, carers and employers and were valuable in demonstrating the Society’s continued compassion for and interest in former inmates.

Despite the Society’s representation of a close, affective relationship between Ethel and her employers, it is important to note that there was a common language of treating servants as one of the family. As Delap and Alison Light demonstrate, many employers formed paternalistic relationships with servants.\textsuperscript{662} Deep and lasting emotional attachments were also established between servants and children in the household.\textsuperscript{663} At times, both employers and servants could find friendship, intimacy and other affective emotions in these relationships.\textsuperscript{664} Delap argues that gift-giving was not only an expression of employers’ authority and power over servants, but could also be interpreted and acknowledged by servants as an act of kindness that was welcomed. Gift-giving thereby played an important role in the establishment of relationships between employers and servants.\textsuperscript{665} Meanwhile, for most, being a servant was still being a

\textsuperscript{660} ‘Our Emigrants’, \textit{Our Waifs and Strays} (March, 1903), pp. 48–49.
\textsuperscript{661} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{662} Delap, \textit{Knowing Their Place}, pp. 72–76; Alison Light, \textit{Mrs Woolf and the servants} (London, 2007), pp. 1–5, 174–176.
\textsuperscript{664} Delap, \textit{Knowing Their Place}, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{665} Ibid., pp. 75–76.
servant, and many felt ambivalent about their experiences whilst others reported loneliness, exploitation and abuse.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 44–45 and Barret Ducrocq, \textit{Love in the Time of Victoria}, pp. 58, 94–97.}

Letters ‘home’ – purportedly written by former inmates to staff members – were dominant features in the magazines that offered readers a unique trajectory of diverse experiences of the lives of children and former inmates at difference junctures in the lifecycle.\footnote{For literature on epistolary practices amongst the poorer classes, see esepcially, Susan Whyman, \textit{The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660–1800} (Oxford, 2009); K.D.M. Snell, ‘Belonging and community: understandings of “home” and “friends” among the English poor, 1750–1850’, \textit{Economic History Review}, 65 (2012), pp. 1–25.} The representation of such correspondence served to promote notions of home, family, and belonging that supposedly shaped the institution’s childcare practices. These features highlighted the potential for informal modes of aftercare contact, notably through correspondence. Magazine letters highlighted that inmates kept in touch through correspondence, and that staff sent letters back in response providing them with support if needed. Moreover, the magazine outlined the Society’s hope that children would foster deep sentimental feelings for the institutional home and family. Magazine letters presented children as particularly eager for communication with the institution whilst others suggested that former inmates felt attached to the staff members who had cared for them.

The validity of these published letters is problematic. Such correspondence, however, contributes to the culture of the letter ‘home’, which Swain and Hillel argue had a long tradition in child rescue literature.\footnote{Swain and Hillel, \textit{Child, nation, race and empire}, p. 160.} Published letters were likely to have been fictionalised, highly idealised, edited or censored. Yet it is unlikely that the tradition of the letter ‘home’ was wholly imagined or served merely as propaganda – analysis later in the chapter demonstrates that former inmates did write ‘home’ to convey news of their progress, their gratitude and their attachment to the institutional family. It is probable therefore, that many magazine letters were rooted in former residents’ correspondence, and their publication intended to remind other care leavers to keep in touch, thereby perpetuating this tradition of writing ‘home’. Thus, magazine letters should be interpreted as a space for the interplay between the ideal, the imaginary and the
experienced. Viewed in this way, the letters become aids to imagining the institution’s ideals and children’s responses to care.

Magazine letters ‘home’ were usually optimistic in tone and seldom articulated feelings of loneliness, unhappiness, failures or abuse. Perhaps unsurprisingly, accounts of care or experiences after leaving the institutions considered to be problematic to the institution’s success story were often brushed aside. One issue of *Brothers and Sisters* acknowledged that not all former inmates’ were able to thrive, stating that ‘there are many things that are far too sad to write or talk about, such as can only be treated with sacred silence’. The statement also implies that the Society were in contact regularly enough to be aware of unhappy circumstances, and that they maintained confidentiality and respect regarding these situations. When the language and tone of published correspondence did evoke traces of children’s loneliness and unhappiness in the wider world, these letters were usually fashioned as reminders of former inmates’ yearning for the institutional home, family and friends. One letter stated, ‘I am sure I am not the only one that wish they could come Back, But of course the room is needed for weaker and younger ones...’ As such, these sentiments went hand in hand with letters that recounted cherished memories of inmates’ time in care.

As propaganda, letters conveyed positive images of the lives of care leavers as well as their eagerness for continued contact with the institution. This helped to legitimise the Society’s work and ensured the institution’s longevity in its practices. The regular publication of letters from old boys and girls also enabled the Society to carefully fashion an image of their enduring compassion for former inmates whilst also stressing the importance of lasting contact. In addition, letters ‘home’ from emigrated inmates that celebrated their progress helped to promote the benefits of these schemes and reassure those who viewed emigration as a controversial childcare practice. Although the Society was actively engaged in constructing the image of successful and meaningful aftercare models as well as children’s usually positive responses to continued

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670 ‘St Chad’s Home, Far Headingley, Leeds’, *Brothers and Sisters* (September, 1898), p. 138.
671 ‘Serving their Country’, *Our Waifs and Strays* (February, 1899), p. 27.
contact, magazine letters nevertheless, were valuable in bringing former inmates to life as individual, reflective and familiar subjects for the magazine’s public readership.

Institutional literature encouraged readers to imagine children’s responses to a range of aftercare mechanisms implemented by the Society. The publication of letters that positioned former inmates as being keen to contribute to fundraising schemes enabled the Society to present children’s gratitude as well as providing an opportunity for reflections on experiences in care. These letters told a specific story about the Society’s work and how the institution envisaged children’s ideal relationships with and attitudes towards staff members. The postbag in June 1904 featured a letter from an old girl who had been invited to join the Happy Birthday League.672 The letter described the girl’s excitement upon receiving the invitation and also informed staff of her happy time in service where ‘everybody is so good and kind’.673

Another letter reflected children’s desire to financially support WSS work following discharge, stating ‘I think every boy and girl who has been under your care ought to do something to show their gratitude for the kindness bestowed on us’.674 The rest of the letter related minute details of the girl’s daily life and her plans for the summer holidays. The veracity of this letter is, of course, doubtful but its purpose in the magazine suggests WSS success, both in turning out good and useful citizen workers and in former inmates’ gratitude made material through donations.

Alongside magazine letters, articles written by staff members further claimed children’s gratitude for the institutional care they had received. In March 1906, the Society remarked that the Happy Birthday Ledger book revealed ‘pages after pages’ of names of former inmates who ‘in their hundreds literally, make each year a grateful birthday offering’.675 Meanwhile, the Society confirmed that there are ‘many others who are members of the Guild of Gratitude, an association of which the title tells its own tale’.676 Such statements reinforced claims that numerous old boys and girls fervently expressed

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674 Ibid.
676 Ibid.
appreciation and gratitude for the Society’s care through small but meaningful financial gifts. These gifts intended to demonstrate a culture of reciprocity between the charity and its welfare recipients.⁶⁷⁷ The construction of such narratives not only legitimised the Society’s work but also validated the function of aftercare mechanisms that hinged on fundraising leagues and contact.

The magazine also constructed narratives of gratitude that presented children proposing innovative means to raise further funds. One letter from an old boy published in the magazine suggested that the institution urge their 8,000 former inmates to put away one pence each week as a ‘token of gratitude’.⁶⁷⁸ The letter stated that ‘the more the sacrifice the more the joy’ that such an action might bring to children who acknowledged WSS care for giving them the ‘chance of their lives’.⁶⁷⁹ Similar narratives are evident in other magazine letters that portrayed WSS care as a lucky escape from the throes of poverty. The magazine published a letter from one woman who stated she read the WSS magazine every month to her daughter. She had apparently enclosed a gift of 5 shillings, which her daughter had saved during Lent for the ‘poor Waifs and Strays children’.⁶⁸⁰

The culture of self-denial was a major fundraising tool for a range of charities at this time, including the Salvation Army and Barnardo’s.⁶⁸¹ As Deborah Cohen suggests, self-denial embodied in practices such as Barnardo’s self-denial week each year, reflected the changing societal attitudes towards rising incomes, material wealth and the perceived need to morally atone for the accumulation of worldly goods.⁶⁸² The letter further explained:

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⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁰ ‘Lenten Savings’, *Our Waifs and Strays* (February, 1907), p. 28.

⁶⁸¹ Self-denial appeals are still used today by The Salvation Army, promoted over a number of weeks, and culminating in a Self-Denial Sunday in the Summer. See http://selfdenial.info/ for more information about the charity’s annual fundraising campaign. See also, Pamela Walker, *Pulling the Devil’s Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain* (Berkeley, 2001), pp. 117, 132.

I do not tell her that her own mother was one of those same poor little girls fifteen years ago, I think she is better left untold. I shudder to think of what might have happened to me…had it not been for your grand Society. I cannot thank you enough but pray that the good work may still prosper.\textsuperscript{683}

The letter highlights the various ways in which the Society represented the ideal legacy of care. First, although the letter suggested shame and embarrassment associated with institutional childhood that parents avoided divulging to children, the narrative presented the act of reading the magazine as an important ritual that could be integral to remembering and accepting the hardships of poverty and the previous assistance received. Secondly, the letter also implied the Society’s success in transformative care: there were no lasting or visible indications that the woman was a welfare recipient or care leaver.

Importantly, the letter indicates the Society’s hopes regarding the ways in which children might remember them for the help and support they provided: subscription to the monthly magazine, supplementary donation, as well as prayers for the prosperity of the Society. This underlying message of the letter formed part of a broader range of published correspondence that promoted old boys and girls’ interaction with fundraising practices, although such features appeared somewhat sporadically. The publication of such accounts that presented former inmates as benevolent patrons and Samaritans probably reflected the Society’s demands for income, whilst also encouraging readers to imagine children’s indebtedness and support of their work.

**Letters ‘home’**

The magazine’s publication of letters ‘home’ promoted the idea that sustained communication and attachments existed between children, carers and other WSS affiliates such as referrers and home committee members. Many of these letters advanced the notion that simple requests for contact with staff members were symbolic of children’s attachment to the individuals that had constituted their ‘family’, often for several years of their childhood. Children’s letters usually followed a conventional format, enquiring about the recipient’s wellbeing and

\textsuperscript{683} ‘Lenten Savings’, *Our Waifs and Strays* (February, 1907), p. 28.
health, notifying WSS staff of progress and success, and relating minute details of daily life beyond WSS homes.

A magazine letter from Annie to her matron ‘Mrs. B’, typified the Society’s ideal of children’s efforts to keep in touch with their carers. The letter recounted in detail her journey to Canada, her arrival at the WSS receiving home in Canada and her placement in service soon after arrival. 684 Such representations of emigration journeys were frequently published several times a year to promote interest and support in the scheme. 685 Other magazine letters depicted more explicitly children’s apparent expectations and hopes for continued contact. These letters aimed to portray the supposed sentimental value children invested in these bonds. George Mr.’s letter to his matron two years after emigrating enquired about the state of affairs at the home and the wellbeing of the inmates:

Are you alright as I am hoping you are? I am getting along first class… How are the boys at the Home and all your folk…I think this is all this time. 686

The capitalisation of ‘Home’ adds a formality and official tone to the letter. It also mimics the WSS’s capitalisation of the word to refer to all their homes in monthly magazines, which might add to a sense that these letters were not genuine or at least highly edited. A further statement proposed his intention for contacting his matron and his desire for a future relationship with her through correspondence:

Hoping to keep on writing to each other…your affectionate friend, George…Good-bye and Good Luck. 687

The letter suggested that George had not contacted his institutional family since his discharge two years before, but depicted him as now wishing to renew contact with his former matron. Despite an apparent lack of contact after leaving the institution, the letter promoted an ideal that children retained a lingering

687 Ibid.
sense of attachment and belonging to former carer, co-residents and friends. Moreover, the letter’s combination of formal and informal tones suggest that even after two years’ silence, children were always welcome to get in touch with staff members. Such letters were valuable in depicting children’s apparent attempts and desire to prolong and maintain personal relationships with staff members.

The magazine emphasised the notion that children frequently expressed their attachment to institutional staff by means of correspondence. Alongside the publication of a collection of letters from old boys to their former matron and master at the Tattenhall Home, the Society argued that ‘nothing shows more clearly the affectionate relations between Mr and Mrs. Hicks and their young charges than the “Dear Father and Dear Mother” with which the letters begin’. 688 These letters reported the minute details of the boys’ lives stationed in India and South Africa that appealed to the interest of a public readership, promoted the success of WSS schemes, and demonstrated the institution’s continued interest in the activities, progress and wellbeing of former inmates. The letters also served as WSS models of love: correspondence explicitly described the familial ‘love’ and attachment that the boys felt for the matron and master, their biological children – Johnny and Daisy – who also lived with the inmates, as well as the friends they had left behind. A letter from Fred B. to the master Mr Hicks stated, ‘Dear Father, I expect you think I have forgotten you I hope you enjoyed your holidays and I hope you are quite well’. The letter concluded: ‘Love to mother, Daisy and all the boys’. 689

Meanwhile, the magazine featured a similar letter from Walter G. that stated he had enclosed a recent photograph of himself for his former carers by which to remember him. These letters demonstrate the Society’s aims to represent children’s anxiety that staff members did not forget them. The depiction of continued relationships between inmates and the institutional family suggested discharged children’s yearning to be remembered within the home and promoted the Society’s model of familial belonging.

William D’s letter to the matron, Mrs. Hicks, evoked a sense of close familial attachment between the child and his carers and co-residents. His letter

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689 Ibid.
asked ‘mother’ to send love to all the boys, but it also singled out the matron’s daughter Daisy by her nicknames, and asked the matron to send his special affection to ‘the Flower’ and ‘Daisy of the Valley’.\(^{690}\) The letter informed Mrs. Hicks that he was sending Daisy:

\[\ldots\text{some more of them Pictures which I sent to the little one once before. I am calling her little but I suppose she is as big as me now because it is nearly a year since I saw her little face… Please Mother tell Daisy to keep the Picture till I send her some more and then she may make a Scrap Book.}\(^{691}\]

As promotional literature, the letter functioned as an opportunity for the institution to portray the depth of feeling and interest the subject had in the friends and familial-type relationships he left behind in the institutional home. The letter also portrayed the boy as thinking of ‘home’ and its inhabitants regularly and promoted the notion that children could strengthen bonds with carers and co-residents by collecting small and thoughtful gifts to send back home, in order to continue to be remembered. As Keith Snell argues, narratives of the poor in their letters to a range of officials and friends often highlighted the importance of feeling connected with ‘home’, ‘friends’ and ‘community’.\(^{692}\) In a continually changing and often unstable world, magazine letters that depicted children writing ‘home’ to WSS staff served to highlight children’s strength of attachment and dependence on the institution.

The letter confirmed that he had enclosed a photo of himself with friends for the matron for this purpose, and that he had asked her to show the photograph to all the boys at Home. The letter also depicts William as having identified specific individuals from the institutional home that assumed an important place in his affections, including the matron and master’s daughter Daisy, and possibly the maids in the home:

\[\text{We send all our love to the Boys of Tattenhall and I also send my love to the Daisy of the Valley, and Dear Mother accept the same yourself and both the Annies, which I hope are getting on all right.}\(^{693}\)

\(^{690}\) Ibid., p. 26.

\(^{691}\) Ibid.


That William identified a set of individuals for which he felt special esteem is important. These individuals, made up primarily of staff members and their children, highlights that William identified with what he perceived to be the ‘real’ family over the generic household family composed of several other co-residents. The institutional family that William composed mimicked the biological family unit. It is possible that within the home, each boy hoped to be considered ‘special’ by staff amongst the other boys, and this letter portrays William’s attempts to be singled out for affection and recognition.

Magazine articles also provided a space in which the Society promoted a range of mechanisms to keep in touch with former inmates, including invitations to visit the institutional home. One article in Our Waifs and Strays stated that practices such as the designation of a separate bedroom in some homes could be used to accommodate children wishing to return to the WSS home during times of hardship or breaks in employment. These ideals reinforced their proclaimed desire to play a continuous role in children’s lives, and to provide them with a lasting family unit. Furthermore, these models of aftercare worked to construct an image that the institution would continue to be a permanent family unit for former inmates, and reassure readers that there was an alternative to returning to the supposedly inadequate and often immoral homes and families from which many children had been admitted.

Magazine letters also present the ideal responses former inmates expressed towards the invitations. One letter from a boy to his former matron at Hedgerley Home expressed his thanks for her invitations to visit her:

Dear Madame, I was very pleased to receive a letter from you, and I thank you for your kind invitation to spend a day at the ‘Home’.

The letter suggested that the boy seized the opportunity to further express his feelings about the home and what it had meant to him as a child: ‘I should very much like to see the ‘Home’ once more for I spent some very happy times the

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694 ‘St Saviour’s Home, Shropshire’, Our Waifs and Strays (April, 1893), p. 57.
695 ‘Serving their Country’, Our Waifs and Strays (February, 1899), p. 27.
short time I was there’. Again, the difference between ‘Home’ and home is significant. Use of the capitalised word implied specific connotations for the magazine’s readership, which were not entirely disconnected from the notion of home. ‘Home’ marked out the Society’s difference from other types of home, and suggested some superiority, especially when considered alongside other articles that criticised the lack of home feeling in other statutory and voluntary welfare institutions. ‘Home’ was also different to the biological family home, which the Society believed unsuitable in its overcrowding, dirty, and often immoral environment. The capitalisation of the word home, like ‘God’, further characterised the institution as a special and sacred place for children.

This subject of returning ‘home’ was not uncommon in the magazine. Another article claimed that a letter from a boy who emigrated to Canada in 1897 was received at the Society’s Head Office five years later. The article informed readers that having found well-paid work in America, one boy had saved his earnings to come back visit friends in his former institutional home in Rochdale. The letter served to reassure readers of his success whilst also suggesting that children could feel a strong yearning for ‘home’ despite or even because of living so far away. Implicit in this article, is the idea that the boy had kept in touch with institutional staff in order to make arrangements to return ‘home’ to visit.

The article further stated this was not a unique occurrence and that children were often welcomed back for visits to the institutional home. The letter also suggested that children mourned the passing of former carers, describing the boy’s ‘sadness’ on hearing that his matron had died stating that ‘she was a nice old lady and always liked to see the boys again’. Whilst the description ‘nice old lady’ does not immediately suggest depth of feeling, it does highlight a sense of comfort, familiarity, and kindness that was not generally associated with a bureaucratic institutional regime. In addition, older ladies were often recipients

696 Ibid.
698 Ibid.
of care themselves, and the statement highlights an implicit sense of sympathy between the matron and the boys.699

Unlike the type of contact that letter writing encouraged, which often focussed on recounting children’s progress and transformation, the depiction of invitations and visits to former institutional homes enabled the Society to persuade readers of the mechanism’s effectiveness in fostering enduring familial bonds with children. Other articles in the magazine portrayed children’s longing to return to former institutional homes for visits and holidays as a preference above other available options to stay with employers, relatives or friends.

The magazine stated that six old girls returned to the Rose Cottage Home during their holiday from employment in 1889 to visit friends and maintain the social bonds they had established during their time in care.700 The Leamington Home also wrote in 1889 that an old girl had stayed at the home for a week’s holiday from her position as cook, in which she was doing well. The enthusiasm for receiving old girls back for holidays and the interest and pride in their achievements was expressed by the staff who were said to be ‘very pleased to see A.P., and trust she may continue to do well’.701 These stories were important in further erasing the children’s relationships with their relatives and promoting WSS childcare practices and interpersonal relationships within the institution that could be more powerful and enduring than blood ties.

Magazine articles used the language of nostalgia and memory to idealise the success of their institutional practices. Regular features in the magazine highlighted the range of responses and emotions children articulated about their experiences of care. Such narratives drew attention to the importance of experiences beyond the institution and the ability to reflect and recall positive memories, which enabled former inmates to appreciate and value their care and the interpersonal relationships they had established. Letters of this type followed

700 ‘Notes from the Homes – Dickeburgh’, Our Waifs and Strays (September, 1889), p. 3.
701 ‘Notes from the Home – Leamington’, Our Waifs and Strays Magazine (September, 1889), p. 4
a conventional format that presented children ‘coming to terms’ with their experiences. The letter ‘home’ was a significant part of this process.

Magazine letters suggested that some children developed an appreciation of the institutional home and family after their discharge. One letter detailed Ernest H’s feelings about his former WSS home:

But I often think of those happy days spent at Hedgerley, although we did not think them at all Happy at the time. But we were young and foolish then, and did not know what the world was...702

The letter suggests that Ernest only came to recognise the value of WSS care following his independent experience in the wider world. It compares Ernest’s experience in the wider world to the protection of childhood in the WSS home, suggesting that the presumed promise of independence does not measure up and throws the once restrictive protection afforded by the institution into relief. The act of writing ‘home’ in order to relay his gratitude and nostalgia further confirmed the Society’s success in transforming inmates to magazine readers. Portrayed as ignorant and perhaps even ungrateful, the letter suggests that even when children thought they were unhappy in institutional homes, they realised how luck they were once they left. In doing so, such letters neutralised children’s complaints, as well as readers’ anxieties that institutional regimes may not be sufficiently fulfilling.

Another letter described one girl’s visit ‘home’ a few years after her discharge and remarked that the institution was ‘the only Home some of us have ever known…but that we did not know how happy we were until we had left.’703 Yet another letter detailed the apparent difficulty some inmates had in leaving the institutional home behind. The letter stated:

I left Liverpool with feelings not of gladness, for I was leaving behind me friends who have been of such value that I can never fully repay them for their great kindness; but of pride in that I was now to stand on my own feet to fight my own way and to try and prove to the people that I was a worthy boy of Elm Lodge.704

702 ‘Serving their Country’, Our Waifs and Strays (February, 1899), p. 27.
703 ‘As Seen from Outside’, Our Waifs and Strays (December, 1905), p. 170.
This narrative had a dual purpose in not only promoting the strength of feeling children felt for the institutional home, but also reassuring readers of inmates’ pride and gratitude in their identification as old boys and girls of the WSS. Presented as eternally indebted to Elm Lodge, the publication of this letter conveyed an ideal that children should prove their productivity and independence as successful young citizens in order to express their gratitude and to compensate the institution for the care they had received.

Other letters drew on sentimental language to suggest children’s poignant reflections on the institutional home. One letter from an old boy, who emigrated to Canada, to his master stated:

Dear Sir…you cannot imagine the joy I have in the thoughts of writing, as it were, home. Could I only come back for one short hour, for one more run around the front field, for one more choir practice…I must stop- there’s something in my throat keeps rising, and it’s all I can do to keep it down - that’s the kind of feeling I have for the Home where I spent the happiest days of life…Dear sir, remember me often if possible…

The sentimental language in this letter encouraged readers to sympathise and share emotions with former inmates, and intended to offer some sense of closeness with imagined children. The letter conveyed the boy’s fondness and nostalgia for the childhood, innocence, protection and care that was now lost. That the boy was now living overseas as an immigrant further emphasised the loss and longing that positioned his time in care as something positive and appreciated. At the same time, the letter’s suggestion of remembrance and yearning also implied the boy’s sense of displacement and loneliness.

Of importance too, the letter’s use of ‘home’ and Home’ highlight the difference between a sense of home and the work that WSS homes did, and suggest that although different in their purpose, the Society had successfully created a sense of home in their institutional environments. The power of the overwhelming emotions, grief and nostalgia that the narrative alludes to intended to call up similar emotions in magazine readers and thereby possessed great publicity value for WSS care.

Contact and interpersonal relationships between children and staff

Magazine literature demonstrates the Society’s awareness of the significance of sustained contact and communication from children in affirming the quality of their childcare practices. Furthermore, the claim that these affirmations come from former inmates enhances its value among a public readership. This section engages with surviving letters to attempt to evaluate children’s post-care communications and to assess the disjuncture between these letters and magazine letters. Case-file material varies broadly in nature suggesting that some inmates struggled emotionally and materially after leaving the institutional home. Little magazine literature represented the struggling former inmate but articles that did were usually requests for the public to donate to obtain specialist medical equipment for former inmates with disabilities.\textsuperscript{706} Case-file correspondence indicates that the Society’s idealised contact practices were not always achieved and at times, such mechanisms did little to resolve the difficult situations that former inmates faced.

Whilst there is a vast literature on the history of disability and institutional care, research has often been slow to address children’s experiences of disability in the institution and beyond.\textsuperscript{707} WSS case files, however, offer unique insight into the trajectories of disabled former inmates, who often approached the Society for assistance following discharge. Many of these appeals were requests for financial support, suggesting that some disabled youths found it hard to find work despite institutional training. In general, these former inmates experienced a limited quality of support, care and further help from the Society who rarely provided economic assistance. Despite the Society’s proclaimed intention to provide the children they cared for with a system of long-term material and emotional care, the case files of just over one thousand disabled children suggest that the majority were only provided for temporarily, and that aftercare for this group was inadequate. Almost 700 out of 1,123

\textsuperscript{706} See the appeal for support of an Old Boy needing ‘cripple’ equipment: Our Waifs and Strays (June, 1902), p. 311.
disabled children were discharged prematurely from the Society’s care: many of them well before reaching the age required to start training in order to become independent. Reasons for discharge were varied but usually centred on the Society’s belief that certain children were not considered suitable subjects for long-term care, as they were deemed incapable of becoming independent.

Other reasons for discharge demonstrate that despite establishing homes for physically disabled children, the Society was ill equipped to provide specialist care for children with serious declining health problems. Similarly, the care of children categorised as ‘mentally deficient’ did not fall under the Society’s remit. These children were routinely discharged back to relatives or friends, who were advised to contact their local Board of Guardians, hospitals, asylums or other homes that possessed greater financial and specialised resources to care for such children. Decisions to discharge children demonstrate that the Society were unwilling to assume responsibility for children they perceived as not reformable or trainable.

In practice, the institution acknowledged that they were not adequately equipped to provide specialist care to severely poorly children. Murdoch has argued that models of citizenship that welfare organisations promoted in order to integrate youths into the nation rested on values of productivity, discipline, self-reliance, and independence. Many children were released from WSS care because of the Society’s assumption that they would not be able to transform these children into independent, productive citizens. The Society’s inability to do so would have had negative consequences on their reputation, public image, as well as their capacity to compete for financial support.

Nevertheless, some children deemed ‘problematic’ stayed under the Society’s care, and case files suggest that they also remained eager for continued contact with staff members following their discharge. Charles Roberts, described as a ‘dull child’ and ‘possibly of weak intellect’ by his referrer and WSS representative Mr Fowl, was admitted on trial to the Hedgerley Farm Home in 1910. Possibly unaware of the Society’s uncertainty regarding keeping him in the

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708 This data has been calculated from the Including the Excluded case file catalogue collated by staff at The Children Society Records and Archives Centre.
709 See discharge details in the following case files: 420; 4160; 4362; 4363; 4828; 6740; 6842; 8181; 10907; 11266; 13686; 15406; 17000; 20981; 21330.
710 Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans*, pp. 120-141.
home, Charles wrote to Mr Fowl in 1910, to express his happiness in the Society’s home, stating:

I get plenty to eat and a nice, clean bed to be on… It is beautiful down here. I don’t want to come home, yet a while.\textsuperscript{711}

The letter confirms that Charles valued the institution’s material provision of care. As Ellen Ross highlights, food and security have an implicit emotional value that does not necessarily map onto our notions of ‘affect’, ‘love’ and ‘emotion’, but nevertheless have emotional capital in forging ties between children and carers.\textsuperscript{712} Despite having recently been found by his master stealing a labourer’s dinner, Charles states he was getting plenty to eat. It is possible that he was being canny and trying to guarantee his stay at the WSS home, despite having been caught stealing. Meanwhile, letters between WSS staff members demonstrate that his matron found him a particularly problematic child to care for. She wrote to Rudolf stating, ‘we are very anxious to get rid of Charles Roberts as he is hardly responsible for his actions and wanders about… He is willing but evidently mentally defective. Due to his mental deficiency, he couldn’t be retained’.\textsuperscript{713} Her attempts to discharge Charles, however, were impossible since his relatives were not in a position to keep him.

Staff members also expressed their concern about the type of work Charles would be able to perform adequately. However, since Charles’ brother had informed Mr Fowl that Charles had learnt boot making prior to admission, he remained in the Society’s care until 1913, continuing with this training in the Islington Home. He was later placed in the Heritage Craft Schools for shoemaking and tailoring by the Society after the Islington Home had trouble finding him a situation. Two years after his discharge, Charles wrote to Mr Fowl to let him know that he was leaving for France to serve his country. He stated, ‘dear friends, I wish you all the best of health and I hope to meet you all when I have done my duty to Christ’.\textsuperscript{714} Another letter was sent a few months later to

\textsuperscript{711} Case file 15019, Letter from Charles Roberts to Mr Fowl, 1910.
\textsuperscript{712} Ross, Love and Toil, pp. 128–166.
\textsuperscript{713} Case file 15019, Letter from Mrs. Stevenson to Rudolf, 2/8/1910.
\textsuperscript{714} Case file 15019, Letter from Charles Roberts to Mr Fowl, 1915.
inform his former master at the Hedgerley Home how he was getting on. He wrote:

Dear Sir, I send all my best to Mrs Fowl and Dolly, hoping they are both quite well... I will write you a letter as soon as we are settled. We are having splendid weather, so closing these few lines wishing you all the best of health.\textsuperscript{715}

It is impossible to ascertain whether Charles was treated differently due to his apparently ‘weak intellect’ by staff at the home, but institutional letters suggest that staff members believed that his relatives or other organisations could provide better care for him.\textsuperscript{716} Yet the content and language of his letters provide little indication of his supposed intellectual difficulties. Furthermore, it is unlikely that he would have been able to enlist in the army had he have been of significant weak intellect.\textsuperscript{717} Whilst letters from Charles suggest that the boy longed for some contact with the individuals responsible for his care, he did not appear to remain in contact with WSS staff and instead wished to build a personal relationship with his referrer, Mr Fowl. It is possible that Charles had known Mr Fowl and his family prior to his admission and that the desire for prolonged contact with his referrer seemed to be a natural course of action. Whether Charles’ attempts to maintain his relationship with Mr Fowl were reciprocated is unknown, since the responses to his letters do not survive.

Children with no disabilities also kept in contact with staff, and asked for additional support as and when they needed. Lily A’s letters suggest that she enjoyed an ongoing personal relationship with her former matron. Letters indicate that her time in service was fraught with sexual harassment and abuse at the hands of her master and she approached her matron for help. Lily informed her matron that she ignorant of the character of her treatment at the time of occurrence, and only realised it after speaking to her mother who ‘told me

\textsuperscript{715} Ibid., 6/5/19.
\textsuperscript{716} Case file 15019, Letter from Mrs. Stevenson to Rudolf, 2/8/1910; Reply from Charles’ uncle to Mr Fowl, 8/8/1910; Letter from Rudolf to Charles’ Uncle, 16/1/1912.
everything I did not know’. The letters reveal that Lily was in close contact with her mother, but chose to inform her former matron of her unhappiness in her situation. It is probable that Lily considered her matron, in a position of authority and knowledge, the person best-suited to help her resolve this issue.

The correspondence demonstrates that Lily’s relationship with her matron was based on her need for help but was framed in terms of friendship and attachment too. A letter written in 1911 while she was being harassed by her employer, stated:

My dear matron, I must now answer your kind letter and thank you for the nice bow and collar. I do not know how to thank you enough for them. You always seem to send me the very things I want. My dear matron, I have not had a very happy Christmas this year. I hope you have dear matron...

The matron’s gifts to Lily suggest that the girl and her former matron remained in close contact. Furthermore, Lily’s acknowledgement that the matron provided her with what she wanted suggested her familiarity with the matron, but may also have been an expression of politeness and gratitude. It is probable that Lily hoped that continued communication with her former matron might help facilitate her removal from her abusive situation, by exercising her agency effectively and calling for help.

Lily’s choice to continue to communicate with the matron following her discharge further indicates that her former matron occupied a significant place in her network of ‘friends’ who could be called upon in times of need. Upon being alerted to Lily’s danger by her letters, the matron communicated with Rudolf who removed her from her employment immediately and provided shelter for her in one of the Society’s London homes, before being placed out again in another position. The case demonstrates that former inmates who retained a link with WSS staff felt able to approach former carers for support and help.

Although few letters survive in the archive, it is likely that other former inmates looked to the Society for assistance in resolving difficult situations, long after they had left WSS care. Moreover, it is probable that, regardless of the

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718 Case file 9445, letter from Lily to matron, 11/1/1911.
719 Ibid., February 1907.
extent of contact that existed between staff and children, the Society felt obliged to resolve such issues where possible in order to avoid negative consequences associated with the children’s experiences following discharge. If left unresolved, problems such as this could have a particularly damaging effect on the Society and its reputation within a broad public audience of potential supporters.

Other children’s encounters with the institution following their discharge highlight the lack of support provided to them, as well as the loneliness and isolation children felt having been removed from their families and placed abroad. William, who emigrated to Canada in 1907, wrote to the Society to let them know that he was getting on well in Canada, but that he ‘yearned for England’. He returned for a ‘holiday’ four years later in 1911, staying with his sister in Islington. He reported back to the local WSS home in Islington in the hope that they would be able to help him find some work or financial assistance. The case file suggests that the Society declined to offer any financial or material aid probably because William was now considered too old to apply for support. In all likelihood too, the Society disapproved of William’s return home. The WSS referred him to the Church Army to obtain some assistance but a letter in January 1912 informed Rudolf that William had absconded from the Church Army Home two days after his admission.

The case file highlights that William eventually returned to Canada, and that he had in all probability, lost sight of his relatives by the time of his death in 1933. Upon receiving notice of William’s death, The Society endeavoured to contact Harriet to offer their condolences, but she was untraceable. Despite having refused to help William when he returned to England, the Society contributed towards his funeral costs as no surviving relative was found. Whilst the Society probably felt obliged to contribute to the funeral expenses after being contacted by Canadian authorities to inform them of William’s death,

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720 Case file 9676, Letter from Mr. H. Wilson to Rudolf, 26/6/1910.
721 Case file 9676, Letter from Islington Home to Rudolf, 9/12/1911.
722 Ibid.
723 Case file 9676, Letter from Church Army to Rudolf, 8/1/1912.
724 Case file 9676, Letter from EMR to Mrs. Harriet Wilson, 29/8/1933.
725 Case file 9676, see Sherbrook Daily Record, Tuesday September 5th 1933.
their payment also ensured that they appeared to take continued interest in their former inmates, even if they had failed to do so during their time of need.

Personal correspondence contained in case files confirms that children were keen for the Society to acknowledge their progress and success beyond the institution. Caroline H’s letters demonstrates that children were aware of their entitlement to rewards from the Society as members of the Old Boys and Old Girls Leagues. Admitted to care in 1914, Caroline spent seven years in WSS care, before being placed out in service. A letter from Caroline’s employer to Rudolf stated that she was doing well in service, and that Caroline spoke of Rudolf with touching devotion.726

The case file demonstrates that Caroline and Rudolf kept in regular contact with each other. Caroline’s letter relate her progress in service and request for information about her family background that would help her reconstruct a sense of identity beyond her institutional experiences. She also wrote in 1922, a year after entering service, to express her disappointment in having not yet received Rudolf’s portrait:

I have now held my place in service for a year and you promised me a portrait but I have not yet received one. I would like so much to have one.727

Rudolf duly sent her a copy of his portrait and a congratulatory letter. Whether such oversights were common is unknown, but aftercare models that aimed to cultivate a group identity through reward schemes, appear to have been ambitious in scope given the thousands of children in WSS care during the early decades of the twentieth century. In all likelihood, keeping track of former inmates was problematic for the institution since many children moved between situations. Furthermore, no formal records survive to detail the number of certificates and portraits sent to children.

Nevertheless, Caroline’s letter demonstrates that she had clear and distinct expectations regarding the desired nature of her relationship with the Society, and that recognition and praise from staff was important to her. Other children articulated similar sentiments. One girl, who had kept her place in

726 Case file 18351, letter from Ms. Ward to Rudolf, 21/2/1921.
727 Case file 18351, Letter to Rudolf, February 1922.
service for over three years, wrote to thank Rudolf for ‘his kindness’ in sending her a certificate and ‘such a kind letter’. She added that she would ‘prize them both and keep them as long as I live’. Her intention to cherish these gifts indicates her strength of feeling about the institution and its staff. Her letter also implies her pride in herself and her achievements.

Case file letters also demonstrate that children’s relationships with staff endured even when relatives survived. Although children discharged prematurely from the institution appear to have been less likely to keep in contact with staff, some case files suggest that children maintained relationships with staff members despite returning to live with their biological families. In 1919, Dorothy Coleshill’s aunt requested that Dorothy return home to her after having spent ten years in institutional care. Dorothy’s aunt believed that she would be able to make a comfortable home for her and following a favourable inspection, Dorothy returned home. As Dorothy was not physically strong, having regularly spent time in the Society’s Broadstairs Convalescent Home, but very artistic her aunt arranged for her to have some art lessons.

Dorothy’s case file suggests that she had established a meaningful relationship with the Broadstairs matron that continued after her discharge and following the matron’s retirement. The matron’s letters demonstrate that she took an active interest in and closely monitored Dorothy’s progress and wellbeing beyond her expected duties. The matron wrote to the Society’s head office in 1924 to inform them that Dorothy was still living with her aunt and she was now embroidering and patterning blouses for a very small wage. Expressing her concern about Dorothy’s future and financial independence, she stated that Dorothy ‘is such a clever girl with her designing and painting that I would like to be able to get her into a good house as a dress designer. Some of these girls are very clever and only want a helping hand’. No record survives to detail whether the matron was successful, as it appears that her endeavours remained a private matter beyond the scope of the Society’s responsibilities.

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729 Ibid.
730 Case file 14978, Letter from Mary Porter to Rudolf, 15/7/19.
731 Case file 14978, Letter from Miss Philips-Smith to WSS, 3/1/24.
732 Ibid.
The matron’s intervention in Dorothy’s future perhaps reflects a difficult or delicate power dynamic in the relationship. It is possible that having assumed a maternal role as Dorothy’s carer for several years, the matron felt it her duty to continue to be responsible for her. Such intervention, however, could undermine Dorothy’s aunt’s role in her care. It is possible that in many cases, continued contact between WSS staff and children who returned to family members caused tensions and difficulties over the recognition and acknowledgement of power, authority and responsibility.

Case files suggest that other individuals that acted as intermediaries between families and the institution remained interested and involved in children’s wellbeing following discharge. Bertha H and her referrer Frances Judge, a lady who lived locally to the family and of independent means, retained close contact through correspondence during Bertha’s time in care. Shortly before leaving WSS care in 1917, she wrote to Judge to thank her for her most recent postcard and inform her that she was being placed in service after her Easter holidays. Her attachment to her referrer was made clear by stating that she hoped Judge would visit her at the WSS home before she was sent to service. Bertha also filled all possible space she could at the end of her letter with thirty-one kisses. Judge wrote to the Society in 1917 having noticed that several of Bertha’s letters appeared ‘rather sad’ in tone. She expressed her concern that Bertha was overworked and depressed after visiting her at her workplace. Following her visit, the doctor had also declared Bertha too poorly for service and as such, Judge paid for her keep to live with her former foster mother, Mrs. Prodden, whom she visited every month at her home on her days off whilst in service.

Judge’s intervention suggests two things. First, that she continued to assume some responsibility for the child, despite neither having been her carer nor having been employed as an institutional staff member. Her sense of duty towards Bertha extended far beyond the role of referrer, and it appears that Judge implemented her own system of monitoring Bertha by visiting her at her workplace. Secondly,

733 Case file 14977, Letter from Bertha to F. Judge, 10/4/1917.
734 Case file 14977, Letter from F. Judge to Rudolf, date unknown, 1917.
735 Ibid.
her actions indicate that she felt some sense of responsibility to the child. Her intervention without prior agreement with the institution and her mediation with the Society over Bertha’s employment suggest that Judge was confident she had Bertha’s best interests in mind. In taking such action, Judge implicitly critiqued the Society’s after-care neglect of Bertha, reminding them of their responsibility whilst also reinforcing her own claim over the child.

Once Bertha had recovered, the institution found her another position as a dressmaker’s assistant. She remained living with her foster mother, for which Judge continued to pay. Remaining perpetually concerned about Bertha’s wellbeing, Judge wrote to the Society again to express her anxiety about Bertha’s journey home from the dressmaker’s shop, which she considered to be a lonely and potentially dangerous journey. The institution duly made arrangements with her employer that she be allowed to leave the shop early enough to arrive home before dark, in order to ensure her safety. However, Judge wrote again at the end of October 1917 to inform the Society that Bertha was not leaving work until 5pm or later and that she was most worried about the ‘lonely walk through the hop field for some distance’. A later letter from Bertha to Judge highlights, in all likelihood, that the Society intervened once more as Bertha had been placed in service with a different dressmaker and was now arriving home to Mrs. Prodden before dark.

The interest Judge took in Bertha is not exceptional. Case files demonstrate that she also took responsibility for overseeing the care of other children, both during and after institutional care. It is likely that other individuals took a deep interest in children, which motivated them to adopt a mantle of responsibility in overseeing their care and wellbeing, alongside the Society. In this case, Bertha was not the only individual who wished to maintain the friendships she had established – Bertha’s referrer Frances Judge, her foster mother, as well as institutional staff were all mutual participants in enabling an enduring and supportive bond to thrive. The case also highlights the complex

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736 Case file 14977, Letter from F. Judge to Rudolf, 23/10/1917.
737 See correspondence in case file 14974. The case file suggests that the child Minnie T kept in contact with Judge during her time in care and after she had been placed in service. When Minnie left her place in service and returned to her family, Judge wrote to the Society to request their assistance in helping to find another situation for Minnie.
struggles for power at play between the Society and other individuals who felt they had superior knowledge of the child’s best interests and wellbeing.

Case files suggest that institutional staff received a range of heartfelt, thoughtful and affectionate letters from many former inmates. The responses sent by WSS representatives to children, however, rarely survive in case files and it is difficult to ascertain the nature, tone and frequency of letters sent by staff members. Some records indicate that matrons and masters did their best to keep in contact with children, confirming the reciprocal nature of these relationships. The ‘first waif’, ‘J’ who was received into care in 1882, sustained a close relationship with Rudolf and other staff members that cared for him for up until his death in 1930.

The nature and longevity of his relationship appears to be exceptional in the case file sample, but it does open up the possibility of this kind of relationship to some degree between other staff and former inmates. Since most of J’s letters were written to Rudolf, these have been kept in his case file. It is unlikely that personal correspondence between former inmates and former carers, including matrons and masters and foster carers, were passed on to the Society for case file records unless there was cause for concern. J’s numerous letters to Rudolf enclosed photographs of himself, poems he had written, news about his health, and the newest additions to his own family. Staff always replied to these letters, and a letter from the WSS secretary encouraged J to keep writing: ‘I am always very pleased to hear from you and I hope that you will be able to send me satisfactory news of both health and progress for many years to come’.

In 1911, eight years after leaving WSS care, another girl ‘F’ began to exchange numerous letters with Rudolf and other staff members until 1942. The case file indicates that a series of difficult experiences including depression and a suicide attempt may have prompted F to initiate contact with former friends associated with the institution. One such letter in 1915 demonstrates Rudolf’s efforts to stay in touch with her by sending her a Christmas card. Her reply demonstrates her expression of gratitude to him for remembering her, by sending him a gift on an almanac. She stated:

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738 Case file 2, see correspondence between 4/2/1907 and 21/1/1930.
739 HLR case file 2, Letter to J., 7/10/1929.
Dear Sir, Many thanks for the card and best Christmas wishes. I have spent a very happy Xmas and hope you have had the same…trusting you will have a Happy New Year and many more to come I am enclosing an almanack [sic] which I hope you will like.740

We cannot know if sending Christmas cards to all former inmates was a common practice but it is probable that the card was sent because of the longevity of contact between Rudolf and F after her discharge. Meanwhile, the institutional magazine indicated that it was difficult to keep in touch with some children. The article reported that one matron endeavoured to keep in touch with one boy by sending several letters but not receiving a response. However, the account stated that an eventual letter from the boy was received in 1899 that thanked her for sending him Christmas cards in previous years and expressed his regret for not having written to her before.741 Such correspondence encouraged readers to imagine that former inmates did not forget the Society regardless of children’s life experiences after discharge, or as F’s case demonstrates, turned to them in times of need.

Other letters confirmed that former inmates returned to visit their old homes. These case files told stories of inmates’ desire to reconnect with their childhoods or to come to terms with their identity or childhood experiences. Godfrey F revisited the Hedgerley Home unannounced, bringing the inmates sweets and other small treats upon his return from the First World War, almost thirty years after his admission to the institution. Although the home and its staff had changed much since he resided there, his visit demonstrates that his time in care had had a decisive impact on his childhood and that he may have reflected on his memories of institutional life whilst at the Front.742 Present dislocations and ruptures in the life cycle in all likelihood, prompted the act of remembering institutional experiences that produced sentimental and romanticised views of happy childhood homes. Godfrey’s longing, regret or nostalgia to reconnect with his former home was probably elicited by recent wartime experiences and

741 ‘Serving their Country’, Our Waifs and Strays (February, 1899), p. 27.
742 Case file 18551, see letter from Hedgerley Farm to WSS head office, 1949.
It is likely that for many children, the institutional home took on an altered perspective when viewed through the prism of upheaval, disturbance or suffering experienced at different periods in the life cycle. Such accounts confirm that for some individuals, past childhood experiences held varied and persistently shifting meanings when remembered and compared to alternative stages of their lives.

Yet, it is important to note that the voices of many former inmates and their responses to institutional care that have not survived may tell a different story. Although few complaints or direct criticisms from former inmates during this period survived in WSS records, children’s silence or their desire not to keep in contact with the institution may attest to less positive understandings about their experiences within the institution. It could also indicate that, for some at least, the Society equipped them for life after care and they felt no need to sustain links with the institution once they forged into the present; they may, of course, have maintained friendships with other children.

Conclusion

Previous chapters have explored the ways in which home, family and care were embodied in a range of institutional practices in order to offer a sense of belonging and nurture to WSS inmates. This chapter has extended this analysis beyond the institutional environment to examine the ways in which the Society envisioned aftercare practices and how they endeavoured to support children after discharge in order to aid them in achieving independence and wellbeing. The Society’s ideal models of aftercare, although rudimentary, challenge assumptions that institutional forms of childcare were inferior to the familial-environments promoted by boarding-out systems. Significantly, by examining WSS representations of aftercare and contact practices in monthly magazines, the chapter complicates conclusions that welfare institutions were largely uninterested in and unconcerned with children’s longer-term wellbeing.

Analysis of the Society’s methods of providing support following inmates’ departure from the institutional home has also demonstrated the WSS’s ideals to create lasting, meaningful bonds with the children they cared for. These ideals were represented, emphasised and promoted by the Society in a range of fundraising literature and form a significant and valuable type of propaganda used by the WSS to legitimise their success in reforming children. Magazine letters ‘home’ are important tools that provide a better understanding of how the institution encouraged readers to imagine children’s feelings and their responses to welfare experiences. The often-sentimental images of aftercare and interpersonal relationships with staff helped to promote WSS ideologies of nurture, attachment and belonging for a public audience of supporters. Moreover, coupled with former inmates’ letters ‘home’ contained in case files, the chapter advances understandings of how children perceived and valued the bonds they created within the institutional home in practice.

Understanding how children reflected on time in care has important implications for challenging conclusions that inmates’ experiences of institutional care were emotionally inadequate. Akin to magazine representations of children’s connection and attachment to the institution, some correspondence in case files suggests that many inmates were eager to retain bonds with the Society at different stages of the life cycle. Analysis of case file correspondence in conjunction with the Society’s published representations of enduring bonds thus raises significant questions about children’s connection and attachment to the institution, the survival and resilience of institutional inmates, the shortcomings of care and aftercare systems, and the reflections, returns and reunions associated with institutional life.
Conclusion

Scholarship has presented the Victorian children’s welfare institution as an oppressive, draconian and uncaring establishment that offered the most basic provision and assistance to enable welfare dependants’ survival. As the introduction to this thesis showed, historians have emphasised the punitive nature of children’s institutions, and have focussed on systems of reform and discipline that underpinned their missions, policies and practices. Such conclusions have been supported by evidence of the regimented nature of daily life and other routines within the institution that stifled children’s energy, character and individuality. Daily life within many children’s institutions differed very little from the routines experienced in other types of punitive institutions, such as industrial schools and reformatories.744

Despite shifting attitudes about the meaning and value of childhood and the role welfare institutions sought to perform, historians have highlighted accounts of institutional care that suggest children’s experiences were largely negative. Historical research has presented very few positive experiences in the Victorian children’s institution. Scholarship has instead, tended to emphasise that residents often felt lonely, unloved, insignificant, invisible, and forgotten. Scholars have asserted that institutional care often exacerbated these feelings, or at the very least, did little to alleviate them. Indeed, historians have concluded that while some children were better off in terms of material provision in the institution, adequate emotional care, a sense of home, family and belonging, were significantly lacking.745 Yet in spite of these conclusions, there remains much research to be done to evaluate institutional inmates’ social and emotional experiences of care.

This study has demonstrated that the image of the totalising Victorian welfare institution is just one strand of a complex story. The thesis has argued that a focus on institutional systems of reform and discipline has too often obscured opportunities to consider more nuanced questions about what the institution could afford inhabitants beyond basic material provision. Indeed, as

745 Ibid., pp. 12, 14, 17.
the study has argued, the historical narrative needs to move beyond the model of the totalising institution, which can be unhelpful in thinking about the development of the institution’s broader role in providing care and assistance to vulnerable groups, and children’s shifting understanding of that system.

I have argued here that Victorian institutions were aware of and much more concerned with the responsibility to provide inmates with a sense of home, family and belonging than historians have traditionally asserted. Institutional policy and practice was, in many cases, concerned with the physical, social and emotional experiences of inmates, in addition to their moral education. At the very least, policies acknowledged that inmates’ behaviour and character could be shaped and manipulated by the architecture, material culture and interpersonal exchanges within the institution. In the case of the WSS, the previous chapters have unpicked the ways in which a rhetoric of home, family and belonging was deeply embedded in their ideology, even if this was sometimes difficult to translate into practice. Evidence shows that the WSS was concerned with fostering positive and meaningful experiences for institutional inhabitants. As such, narratives of home, family and belonging helped to shape practices that were implemented across the institution.

By adopting a broad notion of relatedness, the thesis has demonstrated that the institution was committed to the ideal of the family model, which was positioned as a vital element of inmates’ social and emotional development. This role was fulfilled in multiple ways, through children’s interactions with biological relatives, as well as through ideals that promoted the connectedness and attachment of inmates to co-residents and institutional staff. Meanwhile, the study has demonstrated just how important the physical environment and material culture of the institution was in promoting smaller, more intimate family settings for children. Even in larger residential homes, environments sought to mimic the aesthetic and sensibility of the family home. These environments played an important role in training inmates about appropriate and expected domestic behaviours and rules, and in helping them to cultivate positive interpersonal relationships with other inhabitants. The WSS ideal of homeliness was that the institution as a domestic space would effect inmates’ moral transformation as much as other training and reform programmes.
Unlike many other studies of the institution, the thesis has highlighted how central ideas of attachment, nurture and belonging were in institutional ideologies to care for and raise children. Historians such as Ellen Ross, Joanne Bailey, Julie-Marie Strange and Megan Doolittle have made important contributions to understanding the emotional experiences and dynamics of affect and attachment within working-class families. Much less research has considered the emotional experiences of children within substitute families, including the institutional family. Research in this thesis has begun to unpick institutional attempts to implement familial-type rituals and practices, such as treating children, as a means to understand the mission and ideals of children’s institutions in their broadest sense. Furthermore, such research also contributes to alternative narratives of everyday life in the institution and children’s experiences of care.

The final chapter has further complicated the orthodox narrative of the uncaring children’s institution, by arguing that institutions did to some extent, care about where inmates ended up after leaving care. Although systems of monitoring children’s wellbeing and providing support through outreach and aftercare models were rudimentary and inconsistent in many ways, the study highlights the longer-term concern institutions had for former inmates. Magazine ‘letters’ in the voice of the former child, as well as letters penned by former inmates, sometimes endorsed a positive view of the imagined environments and experiences of home, family, and belonging that the institution sought to create. As the chapter asserts however, to acknowledge positive memories of time in care is not to suggest that the majority of former inmates shared this view. Certainly research here confirms and extends scholarship that suggests that some children were emotionally ambivalent, scarred, and traumatised by their experiences of residential care. Furthermore, the silence of some inmates following their discharge indicated that they neither felt attachment nor

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748 Abrams, The Orphan Country; Murdoch, Imagined Orphans; Swain and Hillel, Child, nation, race and empire; Frost, Victorian Childhoods.
belonging to the institutional home and staff members. Rather, the chapter helps
to move away from evaluating institutional experiences purely through a
negative and critical lens of reform and punishment to consider institutions’
broader aims and ideals and how inmates imagined and responded to these
practices over time.

Overall, the thesis renegotiates the model of the Victorian children’s
institution by unpicking shifting ideas about children’s homes and the roles they
should perform. The research and findings presented in this thesis have broader
implications for scholarship that centres on the institution, family, home,
emotions, identity, childhood and welfare. In particular, the approaches and
findings presented here are likely to be mirrored by other types of institutions. In
addition, by analysing a range of correspondence by inmates and their relatives,
the thesis makes important contributions to the recovery and understanding of the
voices and experiences of marginalised, vulnerable and dependent groups in
general. In doing so, the study confirms the mixed economy of welfare in Britain
in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, emphasising the
individualism of institutional policies that contributed to gradual and often
piecemeal development and progress of childcare policy and practice within a
broader context of welfare provision.

Significantly too, the study highlights the importance of and the need for
greater awareness, recognition and study of mixed affective economies in
welfare practice. This in turn, has several valuable implications for histories of
the family, childhood and attachment. As chapter four has highlighted, historical
scholarship has an idealised notion of familial attachment that has been garnered
from middle-class sources. Evidence here highlights the complexities of other
forms of attachment. This includes the long hours and hard work relatives
performed to avoid familial break up, their objections to children’s placement at
great distances or abroad, their correspondence and visits however irregular, and
their desire for children to return home and to work alongside other family
members. Although these forms of attachment do not necessarily look like
middle-class models they are not less meaningful because of it. Evidence
presented in the final chapter in particular, also indicates that strong ties of
responsibility, attachment and gratitude existed between some children and
institutional carers, and that at times, these relationships lasted for several years.
Examination of inmates’ physical, social and emotional experiences of growing up outside the orthodox family setting and within a manufactured ‘home’ and ‘family’ is important for histories of childhood. Not only does it provide insight into institutional ideologies and children’s experiences of alternative models of ‘home’ and ‘family’, but evidence presented here also supports scholarship that suggests the complex interpersonal dynamics of working-class and poorer families. In particular, the second chapter has demonstrated the obligations, love and affection that existed between children placed in care, parents and other family members through a range of personal correspondence. Although other research has demonstrated that many children felt unwanted, abandoned and forsaken upon entering the institution, research here has demonstrated the strength of feeling, attachment and contact that could remain between children placed in care and their relatives.

The study also has implications for the recently emerging scholarship that evaluates the meaning and experiences of home through the examination of material culture. Research here has further contributed to the study of institutional models of home that renegotiated and extended definitions of the middle-class home in their design and decoration. Chapter three has demonstrated just how important the material culture and physical environment was to institutional officials in manipulating the behaviour and shaping the emotional experiences of inhabitants. In doing so, the thesis also moves beyond the examination of the physical environment of the home, to highlight its role as an important source of emotional support and nurture for children in institutional ideology.

Research on welfare has highlighted the role of reform in children’s institutions, which imitated reformatory processes implemented in industrial schools and other reformatories. The reform of child inmates was usually measured by the display of prescribed behaviours and practical outcomes, such

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as finding and keeping work. The fourth chapter of this thesis, however, has demonstrated how the WSS used ‘treats’ as a means of nurturing their sense of belonging and attachment. The act of treating inmates also had a dual purpose in guiding children’s social reform and development. The WSS promoted the treat, symbolic of Christian love, as therapeutic and transformative in its power to reform children.

Like other research, this study has acknowledged that while the welfare institution helped bring many children out of poverty and removed them from danger, institutional care did not necessarily offer happier childhoods or greater benefits for many other inmates. Correspondence examined in later chapters of the study suggests that some children did experience a sense of loneliness and isolation following their discharge from care. Institutional ideals of providing aftercare to former inmates, however well intentioned, were rarely translated effectively into practice. It is likely that rudimentary follow-up visits exacerbated inmates’ feelings of abrupt ejection from the institution and a general lack of support or concern to ensure their wellbeing. Indeed, it is unlikely that institutional forms of childcare could replace a model of family, home, and belonging for many children. What this study has shown, however, is that greater attention should be paid to ideals, policies and practices that attempted to recreate a sense of home, family, nurture and attachment for institutional inhabitants. In doing so, such analysis complicates the story of the provision and experiences of residential care in the nineteenth century.

This research has demonstrated too, that there are still many avenues to explore in relation to the history of the residential welfare. The study confirms that there is a need for greater focus on the emotional and social aspects of care that welfare institutions offered in practice or, at the very least, intended to offer inmates. Identification and greater analysis of institutional ideals, policies and practices that sought to nurture individuality in inmates which was seen as intrinsic to reform in a variety of other types of institution, for example, would demonstrate just how responsive and holistic these establishments were to the specific needs of their charges. Such analysis would make significant contributions to scholarship on childhood, in its consideration of the role and

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impact of the manufactured family on childhood experience, rather than in the orthodox family setting.

Research on children’s welfare has long established that the ‘orphan’ was frequently a convenient imagined category; all too often family members of child inmates were alive.\footnote{Mudoch, \textit{Imagined Orphans}; Peters, \textit{Orphan Texts}; Davin, ‘Waif Stories in late nineteenth-century England’, pp. 67–98.} Further research that focusses on relatives’ interactions with inmates and the institution would provide greater insight into how disadvantaged and marginalised groups expressed agency, articulated their rights and expectations, as well as the strategies they adopted in order to navigate economic and family difficulties. The expansion of material culture studies to encompass other institutions inhabited by children in the past will also add different dimensions to scholarship, through the examination of how physical environments and objects were perceived as crucial elements in child-rearing practices.

The final chapter of this thesis sought to extend the existing story of institutional care by analysing the ideals, policies and practices the WSS implemented to provide early forms of outreach work, monitoring and aftercare of former inmates. The study of aftercare has been little considered by historians, and left largely as a subject of interest to scholars working in health and social care disciplines.\footnote{Z. Duncalf; L. Hill; and K. McGhee \textit{Still Caring? Supporting care leavers in Scotland} (Glasgow: CELCIS, 2013); M. Stein, ‘What Works for Young People Leaving Care?’, \textit{Barnardo’s Report} (2004); M. Stein and E.R. Munro (eds.) \textit{Young People’s Transitions from Care to Adulthood: international research and practice} (London, 2008).} This thesis has highlighted that histories of aftercare should be significant for understanding the shifting needs of populations over time. As childcare continues to be at the forefront of the public agenda today, the issue of aftercare is also a perennial anxiety. Recently launched inquiries into child abuse in a range of institutions over the last few decades has demonstrated that ideas and practices regarding appropriate care and safeguarding of vulnerable groups is still subject to negotiation. Policy and practice for a range of public institutions concerned with childcare today must be refined in order to avoid permanent trauma and having a devastating impact on those in need or care. Similarly, the issue of aftercare is reflected in current discussions and inquiries on government
policies and best-practice service provision for a range of individuals, such as care-leavers and ex-offenders.\textsuperscript{755}

As such, the study of prior approaches to providing long-term support to former welfare recipients matters greatly in the development of social policy now. Faced with burgeoning questions about duty of care and protection of children in England and Wales, driven by activities such as the Independent Panel Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, this study is important in its assessment of institutional responsibilities towards children’s care and the development of ideal policies and their delivery in practice.\textsuperscript{756} In addition, the examination of the tension between WSS ideals presented in public-facing literature, such as monthly magazines, and the realities of children’s experiences contained in case file material is instructive in demonstrating the policies that worked in practice, as well as institutional shortcomings and failings in the effective provision of childcare and ensuring longer-term wellbeing. Reflecting historically on early and developing practices of childcare provision, such as that of the WSS, should have significant implications for shaping current practice and the development of new models of care and support that aim to improve the quality of care that children receive.

\textsuperscript{755} See chapter 5, pp. 212–213.
\textsuperscript{756} This Inquiry, launched by Theresa May in July 2014, reviews cases of historical child sexual abuse in a range of institutions with a view to making recommendations for the improvement of care. For child sexual abuse historically see, Louise Jackson, \textit{Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England} (London, 2000); Dean Pavlakis, ‘Reputation and the Sexual Abuse of Boys: Changing Norms in Late–Nineteenth–Century Britain’, \textit{Men and Masculinities}, 17 (2014), pp. 325–346.
### Appendices

**APPENDIX 1. List of homes and inhabitant capacity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Largest capacity</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Saints, Yorkshire</td>
<td>6 boys</td>
<td>1892-1905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 boys</td>
<td>1908-1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appleton, Yorkshire</td>
<td>8 boys</td>
<td>1894-1897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 boys</td>
<td>1897-1904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Saints, Essex</td>
<td>8 boys</td>
<td>1886-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 boys</td>
<td>1888-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 boys</td>
<td>1890-1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashurst, Kent</td>
<td>9 girls</td>
<td>1884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13 girls</td>
<td>1885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 girls</td>
<td>1886-88 (trans. to other homes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose Cottage, Devon</td>
<td>7 girls</td>
<td>1901-1903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 girls</td>
<td>1904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audenshaw, Lancashire</td>
<td>12 girls</td>
<td>1894-1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 girls</td>
<td>1896-1921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clapham Home of rest</td>
<td>15 girls</td>
<td>1899-1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>1901-1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Albans, Sussex</td>
<td>14 boys</td>
<td>1896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 boys</td>
<td>1897 (closed due to lack of boys needing homes in area)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bersted, Sussex</td>
<td>40 boys</td>
<td>1892-98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43 boys</td>
<td>1899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47 boys</td>
<td>1900-1903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44 boys</td>
<td>1904-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria, Lancs</td>
<td>14 girls</td>
<td>1897-1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penraevon, Yorkshire</td>
<td>12 boys</td>
<td>1903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 boys</td>
<td>1903-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talbot Manor, Hampshire</td>
<td>20 boys</td>
<td>1890-1897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 boys</td>
<td>1898-1915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Bartholomew’s, Wiltshire</td>
<td>6 boys</td>
<td>1893-1902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Gabriel’s, E. Sussex</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1893-1920 (inherited industrial home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23 girls</td>
<td>1921-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admiral Memorial, Bristol</td>
<td>30 girls</td>
<td>1910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Luke’s, Sussex</td>
<td>24 boys</td>
<td>1902-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26 boys</td>
<td>1904-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33 boys</td>
<td>1910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byfleet Receiving Home</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>1893-1904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvey Goodwin, Cambridgeshire</td>
<td>30 boys</td>
<td>1896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 boys</td>
<td>1897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 boys</td>
<td>1898-1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 boys</td>
<td>1901-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Benet’s Home, Berks.</td>
<td>25 boys</td>
<td>1903-1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucester Diocesan</td>
<td>12 girls</td>
<td>1896-1907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Michael’s, Kent</td>
<td>30 residents</td>
<td>1895-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34 residents</td>
<td>1897-1905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40 residents</td>
<td>1908-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clapton Home</td>
<td>23 boys</td>
<td>1882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Boys/Boys</td>
<td>Girls/Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Saint’s, Girls, Worcestershire</td>
<td>31/30</td>
<td>18-24 girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Mary’s Nursery, Cold Ash</td>
<td>30 girls</td>
<td>1886-1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27 girls</td>
<td>1887-1901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 girls</td>
<td>1902-1906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34 girls</td>
<td>1907-1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Michael’s Sussex</td>
<td>6 girls</td>
<td>1903-1906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordon Home, London</td>
<td>25 boys</td>
<td>1890-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 boys</td>
<td>1892-1901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27 boys</td>
<td>1902-1907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Agnes’ Hostel, Croydon</td>
<td>20 girls</td>
<td>1897-1901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 girls</td>
<td>1902-1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29 girls</td>
<td>2011-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Oswald’s Newcastle</td>
<td>40 girls</td>
<td>1891-1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44 girls</td>
<td>1894-1896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54 girls</td>
<td>1897-1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Cuthbert’s Nursery, Co. Durham</td>
<td>40 girls</td>
<td>1893-1910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee Cottage, Norfolk</td>
<td>26 girls</td>
<td>1888-1891</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>24 girls</td>
<td>1892-1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose Cottage, Norfolk</td>
<td>20 girls</td>
<td>1888-90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 girls</td>
<td>1901-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24 girls</td>
<td>1895-99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17 girls</td>
<td>1900-03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 girls</td>
<td>1904-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19 girls</td>
<td>1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1909-1910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beckett Denison, Yorkshire</td>
<td>20 girls</td>
<td>1900-1905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dover Home, Kent</td>
<td>8 boys</td>
<td>1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14 boys</td>
<td>1896-1905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lampson Home, Dulwich</td>
<td>11 girls</td>
<td>1882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>1883-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 girls</td>
<td>1886-97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27 girls</td>
<td>1898-1905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35 girls</td>
<td>1908-1936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Mary’s Home, Herefordshire</td>
<td>20 girls</td>
<td>1900-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 girls</td>
<td>1902-1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Lawrence’s, Exeter</td>
<td>20 girls</td>
<td>1894-1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 girls</td>
<td>1901-1902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 girls</td>
<td>1903-1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Chad’s, Leeds</td>
<td>30 girls</td>
<td>1888-1892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40-50 girls</td>
<td>1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50-70 girls</td>
<td>1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76 girls</td>
<td>1895-1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fareham Industrial</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 girls</td>
<td>1886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32 girls</td>
<td>1887-1897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Gender Details</td>
<td>Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria House, Formby</td>
<td>30 girls and boys 20 girls and 10 boys</td>
<td>1896-1905, 1906-1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingsley Hall, Frodsham</td>
<td>49 boys</td>
<td>1887-1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Aldhelm’s Frome</td>
<td>30 boys 40 boys 45 boys 48 boys</td>
<td>1887, 1888-1897, 1898-1903, 1904-1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Aldhelm’s Printing Works, Frome</td>
<td>Separate training area to home</td>
<td>1898-1960w</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thornton Home, Suffolk</td>
<td>7 boys 6 boys 9 boys</td>
<td>1891, 1892-1899, 1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goulds Green, Middlesex</td>
<td>10 girls</td>
<td>1887-1892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Mary’s Birmingham</td>
<td>20 girls 30 girls 34 girls</td>
<td>1893-5, 1896-1907, 1908-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home of Good Shepherd for Boys, Worcestershire</td>
<td>12 boys 20 boys 24 boys 20 boys</td>
<td>1888-9, 1890-99, 1900-8, 1909-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Saviour’s, Harrow</td>
<td>15 girls 20 girls 20 girls 23 girls 31 girls</td>
<td>1883-5, 1886-1895, 1896-1900, 1901-4, 1905-1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedgerley Farm Home, Bucks.</td>
<td>30 boys 25 boys</td>
<td>1893-1899, 1900-1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helston Home, Cornwall</td>
<td>25 boys 23 boys 28 boys</td>
<td>1900-1, 1902-4, 1905-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive House, Herts.</td>
<td>10 girls 20 girls</td>
<td>1885-1889, 1890-1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Michael’s, Devon</td>
<td>18 boys 20 boys</td>
<td>1898-1902, 1903-1910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firs Home, Uxbridge</td>
<td>10 girls</td>
<td>1893-1902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayes House, Middlesex</td>
<td>8 girls 10 girls 20 girls</td>
<td>1887-1889, 1890-1894, 1895-1898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarendon House, Hull</td>
<td>14 girls 24 girls 30 girls 25 girls</td>
<td>1892-3, 1894, 1895-1901, 1902-1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Christopher’s, Norfolk</td>
<td>10 boys 12 boys 24 boys</td>
<td>1895-1903, 1904-1907, 1908-1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayworth Cottage Home, Norfolk</td>
<td>10 boys and girls 18 girls</td>
<td>1904, 1905-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islington Home, London</td>
<td>60 boys</td>
<td>1901-1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kensington Training School, London</td>
<td>20 girls 22 girls 23 girls</td>
<td>1899-1901, 1902-5, 1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knebworth Home, Herts.</td>
<td>6 boys</td>
<td>1888-1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knoyle Home, Wilts.</td>
<td>6 girls</td>
<td>1888-1898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
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<td>St Michael’s, Oxfordshire</td>
<td>30 girls</td>
<td>1900-1926</td>
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<tr>
<td>St Saviour’s, Shrop.</td>
<td>15 girls 16 girls</td>
<td>1892-1903 1904-1927</td>
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<tr>
<td>St Katharine’s, Dorset</td>
<td>20 girls 25 girls 27 girls</td>
<td>1891-1900 1901 1902-1910</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bradstock Lockett, Lancs</td>
<td>30 children 40 children 41 children</td>
<td>1901-1903 1904 1905-1911</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arnold Grove, Notts.</td>
<td>30 girls 24 girls 30 girls</td>
<td>1887 1889 1989-94 (closed, transfer St Barn.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standon Farm, Staff.</td>
<td>50 boys 60-65 boys 80-90 boys 80 boys 90 boys</td>
<td>1886-9 1890-2 1893-4 1895-1896 1897-1925</td>
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<td>Home of Good Shepherd, Girls, Stockport</td>
<td>16 girls 14 girls</td>
<td>1894 1895-1898</td>
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<tr>
<td>St Martin’s Crippled Home, Surbiton</td>
<td>25 boys 21 boys</td>
<td>1898-1902 1903-1911</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sutton Home</td>
<td>12 boys</td>
<td>1896-97 (closed)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tattenhall Home</td>
<td>40 boys 45 boys</td>
<td>1896-1903 1904-1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNH, Tooting</td>
<td>12 boys and girls 20 boys and girls</td>
<td>1887-1889 1890-1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Faith’s Devon</td>
<td>15 girls 20 boys and girls</td>
<td>1896-1917 1918-1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bede Home, Yorks.</td>
<td>22 boys</td>
<td>1908-1918</td>
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<td>Walsham Farm, Suffolk</td>
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<td>St George’s Home, Lancs.</td>
<td>7 boys 15 boys</td>
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<td>Scholfield Home, Lancs.</td>
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<td>1892 1894-1905</td>
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<td>St Aidan’s Home, Northumberland</td>
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<td>Connaught, Hampshire</td>
<td>20 girls 30 girls</td>
<td>1887 1908</td>
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<td>White House, Worcestershire</td>
<td>12 girls</td>
<td>1902</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worsley Home, Lancs.</td>
<td>6 girls 6 boys 18 boys</td>
<td>1896 1897 1908-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthing Home, Sussex</td>
<td>12 girls</td>
<td>1892-1937</td>
</tr>
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</table>
APPENDIX 2. Map of WSS homes across England in 1908
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**Parliamentary reports**


**Policy Reports**


The Who Cares? Trust research.


**Websites**

1881 census, Family Search: https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1321821
History from Below conference papers:  
www. manyheadedmonster.wordpress.com

Hidden Lives Revealed virtual archive: www.hiddenlives.org.uk

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