Pauper Children in Wallingford Union Cottage Homes, Berkshire, 1900–1915; Tainted or Recovered?

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Abstract

In 1898 the Wallingford Board of Guardians finally agreed to adopt the ‘Mettray system’, as it was known in Europe, as an option for caring for pauper children, after persuasion from the Poor Law Inspectors and the Local Government Board. It was better known as the Cottage Homes system in the UK and was a family-like establishment, separate from workhouses and considered a better option than the large barrack schools, which had come under heavy criticism at that time. A superintendent, a matron and additional foster mothers cared for the children in the homes.

This dissertation explores whether the cottage homes offered children a route to recovering from the pauper taint, and if this was achieved by the act of separating children from their families but still giving them a familial environment. In addition, it will investigate whether schooling and training aided the children so that they would be able to support themselves after leaving Wallingford Union Cottage Homes and, ultimately, stop being a perceived burden to society.

Wallingford Union Cottage Homes have not been researched before this study. Indoor lists, admission, and discharge lists as well as annual reports have provided an opportunity to profile the children and their parents, whilst exploring how most children were successfully removed from the influence of adults in the workhouse and their families. The guardians’ minutes, annual reports, autobiographies, and newspapers give a glimpse into the lives of the children and their carers. This, in turn, gives a chance to see how the children had mixed experiences in cottage homes, often depending on whether children were able to fit the expected behavioural mould. The study concludes by analysing school reports, annual reports, service and apprenticeship lists and fishing apprentice records. These highlight that the children went on to receive good schooling and
training, after which most girls were placed in good positions near the homes, whilst most boys took fishing apprenticeships in Grimsby and did very well in their positions. In contradiction to the majority of Poor Law historiography, this study paints a positive view of the Wallingford Union Cottage Homes.
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I confirm that this dissertation is all my own, unaided work and that I have not submitted it, or any part of it, for a degree at The Open University or at any other institution. Parts of this dissertation build on the draft chapter submitted for assessment as part of A825.

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Abbreviations

BRO Berkshire Record Office
CPH Cost per head per week
FM Foster mother
LGB Local Government Board
MABB Metropolitan Association for Befriending Boys
NEA North East Lincolnshire Archives
WBOG Wallingford Board of Guardians
WUCH Wallingford Union Cottage Homes
Chapter 1: Introduction

During the opening ceremony of Wallingford Union Cottage Homes (WUCH; see Figure 1A for location map) on the 7th of April 1900, Mr T.W. Russel, MP and the Parliamentary Secretary of the Local Government Board (LGB), declared it was better to have children’s accommodation away from the workhouse, in order to ‘destroy, absolutely, the pauper taint and give children a fair chance’. Digby notes how the price to pay for pauper children’s dependency on poor law was often stigmatisation, known as ‘pauper taint’. 

In the late nineteenth century, the English government recognised that children’s institutional care had ‘marched with the times’ and recommended cottage homes as the primary option. It regarded children not only as individuals, but also as members of families, and cottage homes were, supposedly, the way for children to be ‘freed from stigma.’ Therefore, this study will explore the success of de-pauperising children in institutional care through the introduction of cottage homes. As Hulonce points out, shedding the pauper taint was dependant on several factors, such as the child themselves, their families, schooling, the home and the policies employed. In Chapter two, this study will ask if the children were successfully removed from their parents’ influence, though as

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1 BRO: G/W/4/4/1, Cottage Homes Annual Report, 7 April 1900.
Tomkins’ recent study points out, separation alone was not able to reduce the taint. It will then explore whether foster parents, by providing a family environment, further aided the children’s recovery. Crompton argues education was fundamental to the treatment of hereditary pauperism, therefore, Chapter four will analyse whether schooling and training provided a successful basis for children to gain an occupation and to support themselves.

Placing cottage homes in the wider discussion of childhood, family, and child welfare in the early twentieth century, the study focusses on the themes of poverty and family studied in the first part of the author’s MA in History. Ultimately, the aim is to evaluate if Edith Seller’s claim is correct, that other experiments failed to clear the pauper taint, but the cottage homes have given children a chance and ‘they will take it’.

Figure 1A: Location Map for Wallingford, 1912.

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This study covers the period from the opening of WUCH in 1900 until 1915 and is dictated by the availability of the records. The homes assumed responsibility for at least 202 children, who were cared for by a Superintendent and a Matron as well as numerous foster mothers (FMs), of whom there were thirty-four in total. They were built in a residential area (Figure 1B) and set as a group of three buildings in a triangle with each house planned to house fifteen children (Figure 1C). The largest house had three floors and housed the boys as well as Superintendent and Matron Longhurst. The other two houses were the homes for the girls who were looked after by FMs in each building. These houses have since been changed into a residential development, but the original houses are still visible (Figure 1D).

Figure 1B: Photograph of Wantage Road. WUCH is located on the opposite side of the road to these houses, c. 1900.

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11 The photograph is from the personal collection of Peter Hoddiknot.
Figure 1C: Photograph of WUCH around 1900.\textsuperscript{12}

Figure 1D: Photograph of WUCH showing the Superintendent’s house, which has been converted into a residential development.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} The photograph is from the personal collection of Theresa Jordan.

\textsuperscript{13} WUCH, photographed 10.12.2021 by the author.
Primary Sources

Key primary sources are indoor relief lists from 1900–1905 and 1910–1915, which record the age, religion, status, and duration of stay, as well as the children’s absences, which can be used to profile the children and their background. The admission and discharge lists from 1908–1910 offer a further opportunity to investigate the children and their backgrounds, as the records are more detailed. They note the children’s and parents’ details, and why, where and to whom the children were discharged. In addition, they include a general description that offers valuable information about the children themselves. Other important sources are the minutes from WUCH committee, annual reports, and Guardians minutes, which have been used to explore the children’s experiences and their carers. Evidence from the service and apprenticeship lists, as well as the Fishing Apprentice Register, have been analysed to show which paths the children took after leaving WUCH and how well they succeeded in these positions. The official reports can display challenges as they are top-down, which can cause bias. It is also important, therefore, that autobiographies and memoirs are used to try to find the voices of those children who are often hidden in the records. Newspapers, pamphlets, and periodicals highlight the local and national attitudes towards these children that existed at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Secondary Sources

There are debates in the histography of children’s institutional care, which vary from the negative views of Harry Hendrick and Stephen Humphries to Murdoch’s more complex view of the relationship between parents and poor law institutions and Cunningham’s
‘romantic view’ of institutional care. However, on balance a majority of scholars agree that children could not escape the stigma, even after they have left institutions. As Sheldon notes, being in institutional care carried stigma, which was even increased if children attended a correctional school. In her study of Scotland’s children’s institutional care, Abrams suggests the children became institutionalised and writes about the memory of a child who claimed: ‘there’s a stain on you, a stain’, which stayed with the children for rest of their lives. Bryant’s study of London’s scattered homes, 1898–1914, highlighted that even if the approach to children changed, it was not enough to save all the children. Crompton’s study of workhouse children in Worcestershire Poor law unions, 1834–1871, claimed that children could be rescued from life-long pauperism, but they were considered as ‘tainted stock’. Similarly, Digby notes that the ‘pauper taint outlived the reign of the guardians’. Cunningham is the only scholar to acknowledge that it was the children themselves who were not able to recover from the stigma. On that basis, a cottage homes study can be seen as a test of these scholars’ debates and if the children were able to recover from the stigma that institutional care bought on them, by using Hulonce’s criteria as mentioned above.


15 Sheldon, p. 266.


18 Crompton, p. 231.


20 Cunningham, p. 12.
Different theories exist in the literature regarding childhood, which have changed focus regularly, almost every decade. Ariès much debated and criticized, but pioneering, study of the childhood offers a view that childhood was influenced by culture and the concepts of childhood and family appeared and changed over time.\textsuperscript{21} Pollock’s gender-focused study offers broader perspectives by challenging the importance of the influence of biology in discussing the continuity of childhood. Her compelling argument claims that the children need love and were, indeed, loved.\textsuperscript{22} Therefore, this study offers an opportunity to support Pollock’s view and test Davidoff \textit{et al.’s} argument that children are ‘cradled by the family, however that family is defined and whether it is loved or loathed’.\textsuperscript{23} Lydia Murdoch’s recent study of London’s Barnardo’s charitable institutions focused on the relationship of the parents and institutions, provides the basis for this local study of cottage homes, as it highlights many similarities when it challenges the past histography of the child’s profile in institutional care, their lives afterwards and the families’ roles in the children’s lives. Ultimately, she claims cottage homes were ‘the cradle of the citizen’.\textsuperscript{24}

Historians such as Hulonce and Crompton have attempted to build a picture of children in workhouses and offer valuable comparisons between workhouse and cottage homes. Jenny Zmroczek and Pamela Horn both offer views of the limited career options open to girls and how their expectations differed from boys’, but how education and training could have advanced their positions.\textsuperscript{25} Simon Fowler, Rosemary Hall and John Emmerson all provide a gloomy view of the boys’ destiny as fishing apprentices, whereas


\textsuperscript{24} Murdoch, p. 61.

Knox presents a more positive outlook of the apprenticeship’s opportunities found in this study.\textsuperscript{26}

\textit{Background to the Homes}

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, institutional care for children was changing and more was required for the ‘children of the State’.\textsuperscript{27} England focused on restoring pauper children into family life and offered cottage homes as an option. There is limited literature available of the experiences of children and their parents in poor law institutions and especially little is written about cottage homes. Only Gudrun Jane Limbrick has focused solely on writing about cottage homes, but her studies lack scholarly conventions.\textsuperscript{28} Some historians have been unable to differentiate between systems such as boarding-out, scattered homes or cottage homes.\textsuperscript{29} It is the aim of this dissertation to fill some of the missing historiography of the cottage homes and the children’s experience in poor law institutions.

Prior to the opening of WUCH in 1900, pauper children resided in the workhouse. A report from the Children’s Committee was read in the Wallingford Board of Guardians (WBOG) meeting, which recommended a different solution be found for children in the workhouse.\textsuperscript{30} The guardians’ first choice was to try to keep the children in the existing


\textsuperscript{28} Sheldon, p. 257.

\textsuperscript{29} Michelle Higgs, \textit{Life in the Victorian and Edwardian Workhouse} (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), p. 52.

\textsuperscript{30} BRO: G/W/1/27, Wallingford Guardians Minutes, 10 May 1898.
building due to cost, but further persuasions from the LGB prompted them to draft plans and eventually build the cottage homes on the north side of the workhouse, while still being completely independent from it (Figure 1E).

Figure 1E: The Ordnance map of Wallingford in 1912 showing the separation of WUCH from the workhouse.31

![Ordnance map of Wallingford in 1912](image)

Wallingford and its Children in Context

At the start of the Edwardian period, Britain was seen as the richest country in Europe. However, this dominance was slipping as the country suffered from a declining economy, slowing innovation and rising unemployment rates. Hattersley notes how ‘the poverty was greatest…amongst agricultural labourers’.32 This was certainly true for the agricultural market town of Wallingford in Berkshire, which lies next to the river Thames, halfway

31 BRO: Ordnance map 1910, OS Map xiv.10 edition of 1912.

between the cities of Reading and Oxford, and on the border of Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

Once prosperous, Wallingford was described as ‘a typical rotten borough’ during the eighteenth century. The next century bought some revival of trade. However, the fortunes of Wallingford stayed uncertain until the first world war and most of the labouring families remained in chronic poverty.  

Between 1891–1911 Wallingford’s population declined by 9% but, conversely, the Wallingford Poor Law Union’s population, which comprised twenty-seven parishes (Figure 1F), rose by 8.6% from 13,786 in 1901, to 14,975 by 1911. This was below the national figure of 10.9% but ahead of the county’s population increase of 6.3%. The decline in the malting industry and late enclosures in Wallingford from the mid-nineteenth century provide a stark example of the changing economy and indicate a reason why the population was in decline. Conversely, the surrounding area’s population was increasing and potentially impacting already challenging conditions. This offers an opportunity to next discuss the children who entered WUCH, and the reasons why.


Figure 1F: Wallingford Poor Law Union’s twenty-seven parishes.36

There were ‘children in hundreds who were the outcasts of vice-cursed populations, naked, starved, shelterless, friendless – “nobody’s children”’.  

The above quotation describes the popular perception of Victorian pauper children. They were portrayed as orphans and deserted, ragged children, who were rescued from their villainous parents.  

The State believed that the children were salvable and an asset for the future and should be correctly looked after in order to strengthen the Empire’s power. As Daunton notes: ‘Children belong to the society before they belong to their family’.  

This chapter explores whether the children of WUCH, 1900–1915 reflect this Victorian perception, by looking into their age and gender and the children and their parents’ background. It will also analyse if the children were in WUCH long term, and successfully removed from their parents’ influence, or short-term residents or casual so-called ‘ins and outs’ children, who were reuniting with their parents by discharging themselves repeatedly from WUCH, which would have hindered the children’s progress in recovering from the ‘pauper taint’. As Barnardo’s policy claimed, ‘hereditary counts for little, environment counts for everything’.  

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Whilst the older youths (nine to fifteen years old) consistently remained the largest age group of children in WUCH, the number of older girls declined towards the end of the study and infants stayed as a minority throughout (Figure 2A). The analysis will use the same age groups as categorised by WUCH’s annual reports. It consists of three groups varying from infants under the age of five, the next group ranging from five to nine years of age and the older youths who were classified as nine to fifteen years old. The results of WUCH are like those reported by Murdoch’s study of Barnardo’s, which highlight that the older youths were the largest group of children, although both Erdington Cottage Homes and Barnardo’s still had more young children than WUCH. Figure 2B shows these age group fluctuations in WUCH, which indicated older girls declining after 1914. These variances are evidenced by the Superintendent complaining how the year 1914–1915 was difficult due to the lack of older girls, as they were unavailable to help with the upkeep of the cottages. Also, the preference for the older children and boys can be seen in the notes of WBOG when they requested the children arriving from Henley Union to be a majority of boys and over the age of eight. Consequently, the indoor list confirmed that 60% of the children from Henley were originally boys and all the children were over the age of eight. Limbrick’s study of Erdington Cottage Homes, 1911 shows similar trends to WUCH, when older boys continued to be the main group and the older girls declined in number.

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7 BRO: G/W/1/30, Wallingford Guardians Minutes, 26 January 1904.

8 BRO: G/W/10/1, WUCH Indoor Relief List 1900–1905.

9 Limbrick, p. 19.
Figure 2A: Children by age group 1900–1915 in WUCH.\footnote{BRO: G/W/4/4/1-8, Cottage Homes Annual Reports, 1900–1915.}

Figure 2B: Children’s age groups and gender fluctuations in WUCH, 1900–1915.\footnote{G/W/4/4/1-8, Cottage Homes Annual Report, 1900–1915.}
Children and Parents’ Background

Daisy’s memories during the 1910s in Erdington Cottage Homes recalled how ‘The children from the Cottage Homes either had no parents or their parents had died’. Similarly, Longmate, Crompton and Alasi’s study of a local workhouse in Henley, only few miles away from Wallingford, claimed that the children were orphans or deserted by their mothers in the poor law institutions. But the findings of the WUCH children contradicts this and supports Murdoch’s more recent argument that only a minority of the children in institutional care were orphans or deserted. For the purpose of analysis to determine the background of the children, a sample of two years, 1908–1910, based on the admission and discharge lists was investigated. It must be noted that the analysis may contain some bias due to the small sample size, but can be used comparatively with Murdoch’s study, which is based on the selected year of 1909 for the similarity. The analysis of WUCH identified that orphans were the second smallest group, only 15%, after those children with only fathers, 12%; these results are similar compared to Barnardo’s institutions which claimed 17% of children were orphans (Figures 2C and 2D). Similarly, Wagner claims less than one third of the children admitted to the homes were, indeed, total orphans. Bryant points out, the number was even lower in her study of scattered homes.

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12 Limbrick, p. 22.


14 Murdoch, pp. 73–75.

15 Murdoch, p. 72.


Figure 2C: Background of permanent Barnardo’s children admission’s, 1909.\textsuperscript{18}

Figure 2D: Background of WUCH’s children admissions, 1908–1910.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18} Murdoch, p. 72.

\textsuperscript{19} BRO: D/XGW/1, WUCH Admission and Discharge List, 1908–1910.
The largest group of children in WUCH was those with a parental status of only mothers alive at 52%, followed by children who had both parents alive, 18%. These results are also like those reported by Murdoch of Barnardo’s, which highlights 51% of mothers were alive and an only marginally bigger portion of 21% had both parents alive. The official report in 1909 supports how widows formed the largest group.\textsuperscript{20} The mothers being the largest group highlights the challenges they faced after losing the breadwinner in the family.\textsuperscript{21} As also seen in WUCH, the death of a father rather than the mother was more likely to be a cause for a child to enter an institution.

Many of the WUCH’s children’s mothers were in the workhouse or one of the parents was in an institution, either prison or an asylum, based on the analysis on the sample of forty-five sets of parents found in the admission and indoor lists of 1908–1910 (Figure 2E).\textsuperscript{22} It must be noted that the sample is small, but it can give a glimpse into the lives of parents and give further reasons why children were housed in WUCH. This supports Murdoch’s argument that even if it would have broken the nuclear family unit, parents used WUCH as temporary relief to survive during challenging personal circumstances and economic crises.\textsuperscript{23} Similarly, Levene’s study of the Foundling Hospital in London 1741–1756 argues that mothers used workhouses or hospitals as an ‘economy of makeshift’ as a way of alleviating the challenges they faced.\textsuperscript{24} Also, Digby’s study of rural Norfolk workhouses after the New Poor Law 1834 concludes that ‘workhouses could be

\textsuperscript{20} PP. 1909 \textit{Report of the Royal commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress}, Vol I. p. 64.

\textsuperscript{21} Murdoch, p. 78.

\textsuperscript{22} BRO: D/XGW/1, WUCH Admission and Discharge Book, 1908–1910.


\textsuperscript{24} Alysa Levene, Thomas Nutt and Samantha Williams, eds, \textit{Illegitimacy in Britain, 1700–1920} (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 36.
compatible with social welfare'. Crowther describes it as ‘embryonic social services’. But Ramey’s study of working-class fathers and orphanages in Pittsburgh 1878–1929 points out that also single fathers used orphanages as child care. On the other hand, Longmate and Crompton believed parents had no involvement in choosing their welfare.

Figure 2E: Outlining parent’s whereabout, 1908–1910.

The story of Ellen Bridges further supports Murdoch’s and others arguments about how parents relied on poor law institutions for support. Ellen attended Wallingford workhouse infirmary in 1902 when she was pregnant, and placed her two younger children, Harry aged five and Bernard aged two, in WUCH when she had her third child, Phyllis. She returned to the workhouse again to have her fourth child, William, in 1904 and


28 Crompton, p. 107, p. 228.

29 BRO: D/XGW/1, WUCH Admission and Discharge Book, 1908–1910.
placed her children into WUCH again. Later, Ellen’s children spent most of their time in WUCH. As discussed in the Introduction, the economic conditions were challenging at the start of the twentieth century in Wallingford, which could have impacted the number of mothers leaving their children behind, though it could not have been an easy choice, as Ross’ study on the interaction between the parents and the institution identifies.

Long Term or Casual Children?

The children in WUCH were successfully removed from the workhouse and stayed in WUCH longer term, which could indicate that most children escaped any negative influence of their families and upbringing. However, WUCH did not completely forbid the children from seeing their families, but limited the relatives' visits to every third Saturday afternoon for two hours. This partly supports Murdoch’s argument that even if the goal was to separate the children from the families, this was not fully achieved due to ‘short-term stays, visitation policies, parental supervision’. In terms of removing the children from the workhouse, Wallingford Union Workhouse’s Census records from 1898 to 1901 highlight how WUCH successfully managed this; in 1901 there were only five children in the workhouse compared to twenty-nine in 1891. It must be noted that the census is a snapshot and figures could fluctuate during the year. Yet still nationally in 1908, 21% of

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30 BRO: G/W9/1, Medical Officer’s Book, 28 April 1902, 26 July 1904; BRO: G/W10/1-2, WUCH Indoor Relief List, 1900–1915.


32 BRO: G/W1/28, Wallingford Guardians Minutes, 19 June 1900.

33 Murdoch, p. 94.

34 RG13/1139/64; RG12/986/198.
all indoor and outdoor pauper children were residing in workhouses.\footnote{PP. 1908 T.J. Macnamara \textit{Children under the Poor Law: A Report to the President of the Local Government Board}, pp. 5–6.} Also, when looking into just the indoor pauper statistics, the official record claims that the success of cottage homes can be seen, as in the workhouses in 1899 there were 48.7\% children, and this was reduced to 36\% by 1908.\footnote{PP. 1909 \textit{Report of the Royal commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress}, Vol I, p. 63.}

Many of the children were long-term residents in WUCH, which contrasts with the recent historiography that most children were short-term residents.\footnote{Murdoch, p. 98; Lesley Hulonce, \textit{Pauper Children and Poor Law Childhoods in England and Wales, 1834–1910} (Rounded Globe, self-publishing, 2016), p. 21.} The analysis of the average stay from the indoor lists from 1900–1905 and 1910–1915 highlights that, in the beginning, the average stay was 22.5 months, which reduces to 20.8 months during 1910–1915, whereas the study of Swinton poor law schools in Manchester Union notes that children stayed much shorter periods, less than a year.\footnote{Murdoch, p 98.} There is a change after 1908 and the number of casual children increased, which meant more children were keeping in touch with their families, and this was seen as hindering their progress of their reformation.\footnote{Gudrun Jane Limbrick, \textit{Inside the Gates of Children’s Cottage Homes} (Birmingham: WordWorks, 2018), p. 79.} As Hulonce argues, these casual residents, so called ‘ins and outs’, were feared as they caused the disturbance for the institutions and other inmates.\footnote{Hulonce, pp. 48–49.} Synnot described these children as ‘paupers, usually of the lowest class…. The casuals must know more of the charms of the street life of liberty, and infinitely more of evil’.\footnote{Synnot Henrietta, \textit{Little Paupers, 1874}, pp. 954–955.} Macnamara even claimed the casual children fail the system.\footnote{PP. 1908 T.J. Macnamara \textit{Children under the Poor Law: A Report to the President of the Local Government Board}, p. 20.} The analysis of the children admission records indicates that the
readmission rate increased from a relatively low 19% to 45% between 1900–1915, which was because of a noticeable increase after 1908 (Figure 2F). The severe weather during 1908 could explain some of the increased readmission rates, as it heavily impacted most of the surrounding area, which was mainly relying on agriculture as income. Similarly, Murdoch notes, a third of inmates were readmitted in Marlesford Lodge during the 1890s.\(^{43}\)

Crompton argues 40–60% of the children were ‘ins and outs’.\(^{44}\) In addition, Poor Law Officials estimated two-thirds of the children in institutions were ‘in and outs’.\(^{45}\) WUCH fell more in line with Murdoch’s study, than Crompton’s and the state’s calculations.

Figure 2F: Readmissions of residents in WUCH, 1900–1915.\(^{46}\)

\(^{43}\) Murdoch, p. 97.

\(^{44}\) Crompton, p. 150.

\(^{45}\) Murdoch, p. 98.

\(^{46}\) BRO: G/W/10/1-2, WUCH Indoor Relief List, 1900–1905, 1910–1915.
Furthermore, the stories of siblings Victor aged six, and Ivy, aged three, confirm that in hardship, as discussed above, parents relied on institutional care for their children and themselves. Victor leaves WUCH seven times and was absent for total of 251 days. The length of his absences ranged from between four days to seventy-nine days. Ivy left four times and was absent for a total of 139 days. They also stayed in the workhouse with their mother, and their parents were listed in the workhouse.

**Conclusion**

Most of the children at WUCH were older youths among a declining population of older girls and a small number of infants. The children of WUCH were not reflective of the popular Victorian perception, that most children were orphans and deserted. Indeed, most children in WUCH had at least one parent alive, which also echoes Murdoch’s current historiography. This study also identified that the children come from a variety of backgrounds, which could potentially explain the reasons that parents, mainly mothers, relied on WUCH for support. It can be argued that most of the children were removed from the influence of the adults in the workhouse and the influence of their parents, and therefore successfully in most cases also removed from ‘pauper taint’.
Chapter 3: Cottage Homes: Family Homes or Institution?

Our Children

But yet may they still, those children,  
Be thought to forget their pain;  
And, gathered in arms that love them,  
Their laugh may come again;  
And the stare of woe, and the craft, may go,  
And the spirit be washed of stain.¹

The above quotation gives a glimpse into attitudes towards children, home, and family, in the late nineteenth century. From the seventeenth century, childhood had been transforming away from wage-earning children, towards a sentimental view of children as ‘of a nation’, which was important to the stability of the society.² Consequently, Shorter argues, society placed children’s development and happiness above anything else.³ This chapter will examine the extent to which WUCH staff impacted the children’s lives. It will also explore if the central Victorian ideal of the loving family was reflected in WUCH. Therefore, as Hill suggested in her article in 1896, did it help to remove the pauper taint from the children by restoring children into a family life?⁴

¹ J. O. Bevan, Necessitous and Pauper Children (Hereford: Jakeman and Carver, 1891)
The successful running of the cottage homes depended heavily on FMs and how they impacted the children’s lives, for better or worse, even if many cottage homes struggled with a large turnover of staff.\(^5\) As Mr Russel said:

> Its success depended on good foster parents because that is the pivot upon which the whole thing turns. I told your Lady Superintendent that everything depended upon her, if the children are brought up under influence of family and they will be dissociated from the pauper taint.\(^6\)

In addition, T.J, Macnamara warned: ‘if you guardians are careless in their selection of officers and teachers…the chances are that much of your expenditure will have been wasted’.\(^7\) Other studies of cottage homes highlighted how the role of the staff was important and how they significantly influenced the lives of the children in their care. Limbrick uses a memory from a woman who attended a cottage home in the 1950s to describe the environment, saying: ‘it’s people that make a home’.\(^8\)

An analysis of the archive records of FM’s at WUCH was used to gain an insight into their lives. However, this small statistical analysis can carry marginal errors, as six of the FM’s recruitment data is not available and one lacks personal details. WUCH hired only single or widowed women without children as FMs. Behlmer’s concept of the family as a social, patrilineal, and nuclear unit did not match WUCH, with its many FMs and only


\(^6\) BRO: G/W/4/4/1, Cottage Homes Annual Report, 1900–1901.

\(^7\) PP. 1908 T.J. Macnamara *Children under the Poor Law: A Report to the President of the Local Government Board*, p. 18.

one stable couple. In contrast, Erdington’s larger cottage home villages had married FMs, and their husbands lived with them in the homes. When looking into WUCH FMs’ backgrounds in more detail, it is possible to see that they came from all over the country, making them unfamiliar with Wallingford. Most FMs were young, with the average age being twenty-eight, which in comparison was eight years younger than in Camberwell scattered homes. Three of the FMs had previous experience in cottage homes and two had worked in schools before. Others were nursing assistants. This indicates that only 20% of the FMs at WUCH had experience with children before starting employment there. It could have been that some FMs did not want to disclose parts of their experience, for example child minding, being a servant or a maid, or just having experience coming from a from large family, all of which were seen as lower-status jobs.

FMs changed often in WUCH and during its first fifteen years there were thirty-four FMs, which meant that, on average, each house had new FM at least once a year. When looking into the detail, 68% of the FMs stayed less than one year. This contrasts what Cottom found in her study of scattered homes, where the average length of service was fifteen years. She claims it was because of their older age that they were more capable. On the other hand, Jesse Longhurst and his wife were appointed as Superintendent and Matron in 1900 and stayed in WUCH for twenty-seven years, providing continuity for WUCH. There are peaks and troughs of stability during 1900–1915 in WUCH, as eleven FMs changed during the first four years after its opening. Again

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10 Limbrick, p. 17.


between 1912–1915, another ten FMs resigned shortly after their appointments. Superintendent Longhurst wrote, in 1901, that they were working under a ‘double disadvantage of having delicate FMs’. Later, in 1913, he wrote how the ‘frequent changes of FMs in the infant’s home has made the work difficult and trying’. There were varied reasons why FMs left WUCH, some for different posts in other cottage homes, or to get married. Some FMs left because of the hard-working conditions or low pay, such as Miss Olive Davies, who complained about her yearly salary of £26. Superintendent Longhurst secured her an increased salary of £30, but not for her peers, as salaries had already increased from £20 to £26 in 1904 to encourage more applicants and to counteract the fast turnover of FMs. As a result, this increase could have influenced the greater stability of FMs after 1904. However, the salary was still less than the amount offered in London, which was £30. Miss L. King and Miss L. Bowman resigned in 1902 after less than four months in their posts, stating that not only did they not receive enough assistance for the washing, as it was supposed to be provided for them, but also accusing their Matron of beating six of the children. WBOG noted this case was fully investigated, although their investigation and decision making took only ninety minutes compared to other investigations that took days or weeks to resolve. Consequently, the verdict was that the committee had confidence in the Superintendent and Matron, and the case was closed.


14 BRO: G/W/4/4/1, Cottage Homes Annual Report, 1900–1901.


18 Bryant, p. 40.

19 BRO: G/W/4/1, Minutes of Cottage Homes Committee, 1900–1908.
Only four FMs stayed longer than the average, during the period 1906–1909. This is surprising as in this period WUCH was overcrowded and suffered multiple epidemics. The findings indicate that FMs’ working conditions were hard and whilst some of the FMs challenged this, they achieved little in the way of change, which is comparable to Bryant’s study of scattered homes. FM tried to ensure the wellbeing of the children and did not accept their ill-treatment. However, some of the staff were young, unexperienced, underpaid and overworked, which partially led to the fast turnover of FMs. This would have made it difficult for some children to be able to build relationships. Even nowadays some children’s residential care institutions are still struggling with ‘disempowered staff who often feel unable or ill-equipped to meet children’s needs.’

Children’s Experience

Children’s experiences varied in WUCH, with some having good relationships with their carers and some who were not so fortunate. By the late nineteenth century, some in society believed that cottage homes had succeeded in delivering a ‘real home training and mutual affection between the children and their foster parents’. The selection process for FMs noted, how it ‘must be remembered that with this work one great characteristic to be sought is individual care and attention’. In addition, some studies of childhood have

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21 BRO: G/W/9/1, Medical Officer’s Book, 22 April 1907, 2 August 1908, 13 July 1910; Ministry of Health Report, Medical Officer of Health, West Berkshire United Sanitary Districts/ West Berkshire united Districts, Annual Report 1913–1914.

22 Bryant, p. 38.


highlighted that the child’s environment was important for their well-being and development, but equally how they were not to expect love and affection whilst in institutions.  

Although, Pollock notes, not only do children need love but adults have always shown love for children and had loving relationships.

There are varied debates, based on oral histories and autobiographies, on how children’s experiences varied in cottage homes, and while they might spread over larger time spans and locations (covering all the United Kingdom and from 1820–1960), they can still give us a glimpse into the life of a child in a cottage home. Limbrick claims, however, that it is impossible to classify the ‘typical’ experience of life in cottage homes. Burnett’s collection of working-class autobiographies and diaries recognised that however wide the ‘sample’ of autobiographies may be, the poorest classes are always less represented. His collection has only few first-hand accounts of cottage homes but in one note, Nora Adnams, who lived in Dr Barnardo’s Cottage Home at Barkingside from 1904–1911, recollects her ‘years there continued to have feelings of fear, hate and rejection’. She notes how her FM ‘insisted on her nightly kiss, this “Mother” was not loved’. In addition, Humphries et al. claim that many of the institutions frequently abused the extensive powers they had over the children in their care and had ‘absolute power over the

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29 Limbrick, p. 66.

30 Burnett, p. 12.

31 Burnett, p. 167.
This is evident from the memories of Wilfred Chadwick who attended Firbank Scattered Homes in 1914. He wrote:

They never use your name: I was number seven and we had a mother who looked after us. Ooh, she was heartless and cruel! You lived in fear. There was no love.

She showed no sympathy’.  

This is also demonstrated in a pamphlet from 1894 which agreed ‘As to abuses, or cruelty, they have probably been pretty evenly distributed, at times, over every method of dealing with “the wards of the State”’.  

Also, some children faced these negative experiences in WUCH. Sarah Atkins was twelve years old when she arrived at WUCH in 1901. Her mother made a complaint accusing Superintendent of ill-treating her daughter. WBOG started a formal investigation, which included only testimony from the Matron that nothing had happened. They accepted her statement that all the allegations were untrue about the beating of Sarah Atkins, and case was closed.  

Additionally, there is evidence of girls receiving a corporal punishment after allegedly stealing six pence from their FM 1908.  

In 1915, the Ladies Committee raised questions concerning the children’s punishment in WUCH. The clerk explained that orders enforced were those adopted by Sculcoates Union’s Hessle Cottage Homes and had not changed since they were supplied to the Superintendent when WUCH was opened 1900.  

Even if a WUCH’s purpose was a family environment, trust between few of the children and staff would have been low.  

Additionally, Humpties notes how the system could have never been successful playing

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32 Humpties and others, p. 90.
33 Humpties and others, p. 94.
34 Howard Association, p. 1.
35 BRO: G/W1/30, Wallingford Guardians Minutes, 20 October 1903, 17 November 1903.
36 BRO: G/W/4/2, Minutes of Cottage Homes Committee, 15 October 1908.
37 BRO: G/W/3/1, Women’s Committee Minutes, 13 April 1916; www.workhouses.org.uk [accessed 5.5.2022]
directly against its purpose, as the system was designed to remove children from working-class family life and then contradictorily, children were expected to recreate affectionate relationships with their custodians.\(^\text{38}\)

In contrast to the negative experiences above, some children had a different view of cottage homes. Cottam claims that the small-scale cottage homes were able to offer for some children a good experience.\(^\text{39}\) A conversation with Theresa who attended WUCH in the 1960s explained how she had fond memories of WUCH. She and her sister developed a deep relationship with their FM, whose memorial book said:

You dedicated your life to improve our lives,
You created home where we felt at home.
Everything tidy, chores all done,
A carefree childhood, with lots of fun.
Happy memories that last.\(^\text{40}\)

Similarly, Hitchman recalled her fond memories of her Barnardo’s home in Barkingside and how between her and her FM ‘eventually respect, and even a spark of love grew’.\(^\text{41}\) It is possible that, as Davidoff \textit{et al.} claimed, potentially ‘for the youngest children, the person to whom they relate on a day-to-day basis is more important than the category of their carer.’\(^\text{42}\) Another sign of a bond between children and their carers can be seen when Longhurst noted in his annual report, that Matron keeps in touch with the children who had

\(^{38}\) Humphries, pp. 216–217, p. 239.

\(^{39}\) Cottam, p. 183.

\(^{40}\) Theresa, Jordan, \textit{Our Babs}.


left WUCH, up until the age of eighteen or sometimes older. Longhurst also mentioned how one of the boys, who was a twenty-one year old indoor servant, came and visited them to ask for advice. It must be noted that this evidence was produced to be seen by others and as part of a formal report, and therefore may include bias. Similar events are also visible in scattered homes where the children’s relationships with their FM’s were good and they returned to visit them, sometimes with their own children. Bryant’s study found that there were some strong bonds between the carers and children, but she also notes that there was also alleged neglect and abuse. Similarly, this study casts some doubt over whether WUCH were successful in creating familial relationships with all the children, but it confirms Hulonce’s argument that the children’s wellbeing and treatment was dependent, to a large extent, on their FM.

The debate regarding whether the children were loved by their foster parents in the past is seen, as Rhodes calls it, ‘a bit of a red herring’ as she points out that the definition of ‘love’ and ‘children’ can be defined and understood many different ways. Perhaps Murdoch’s description of cottage homes as a ‘peculiar version’ of family was partially true in WUCH. Similarly, a recent study echoes this study’s findings, the children’s home can offer home-like experiences for some children and give a feeling of

45 Cottam, p. 184.
46 Bryant, p. 37.
47 Hulonce, pp. 45–46.
48 Rhodes, p. 128.
belonging, while there are also children for whom the sense of belonging is more complex’. 50

Children’s well-being

One argument is that cottage homes successfully cared for the children’s wellbeing and offered a decent quality of life for the children. As Bevan 1891 wrote:

Much may be done, even during the time that children are inmates of the house, to raise the standard of life. Endeavor can be made to get rid of the workhouse taint, to assimilate the surroundings to those of ordinary dwelling. 51

However, it must be noted that when looking into children’s well-being, the condition that a child was in before entering WUCH would also have influenced the child’s perception of their time in the cottage homes, such as Edward Kinslingbury, aged eleven, Frederick, aged seven and their sister Annie, aged four, who arrived in WUCH in a ‘most filthy poor condition’. 52 For these children having a bed, food, medical support and being able to attend school could have been a better option than continue living outside in poverty. There are limited studies focusing on children’s experiences in institutions, although Crompton’s study of children’s lives in rural Worcestershire workhouses, 1834–1871, offers one comparable study as he takes into consideration necessities and education. He argues pauper children in poor law institutions could have been more fortunate than children outside the institution. 53 Similarly, Tomkins points out how the Erdington cottage

51 Bevan, p. 9.
52 BRO: G/W/9/1, Medical Officer’s Book, 27 September 1901.
home had a positive outlook as children were well fed and in nice surroundings.\textsuperscript{54} In contrast, Bryant’s study found that the standards of living were marginally better outside of the scattered homes, but it could have been due to the area being in urban ‘respectable poor’ with higher average earnings when compared to more rural Wallingford.\textsuperscript{55}

Measuring the quality of life is difficult, but this study will attempt to use cost per head per week (CPH), to highlight the differences between children’s institutions and in society outside. The cost per head can be taken as an indication of what level of necessities the children received, like food and clothing. Seller noted in 1896 that the average cost of an institutional child was 6s.3d per week.\textsuperscript{56} Based on analysis of WUCH’s annual reports, the average CPH was 8s.6d. Upon opening and at the end of the study the CPH was over 11s., which was also the case in 1904–1905.\textsuperscript{57} Calculations based on Williams’ study of 1900–1915 show the average CPH was 8s.1d. per week.\textsuperscript{58} Bryant’s study noted that scattered homes in Camberwell had lower costs of 7s.6d. per week.\textsuperscript{59} Macnamara recorded in his report of 1908 that the CPH varied from 3s.7d. to 7s. per week in ordinary institutions, but that some cottage homes costs were over 11s. or 12s. per week.\textsuperscript{60} This shows WUCH average costs were comparable to other institutions, but potentially up to 30\% lower than some higher-cost cottage homes. Reeves highlights the impossibility of a working-class family surviving on less than 26s. per week, even if only one-third to fifty percent of the men in the United Kingdom were earning less than 25s. per week. She notes

\addcontentsline{toc}{section}{References}


\textsuperscript{55} Bryant, pp. 30–31.


\textsuperscript{57} BRO: G/W/4/4/1-8, Cottage Homes Annual Report, 1900–1915.


\textsuperscript{59} Bryant, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{60} Macnamara, p. 6.
how the agricultural labourers’ average salary varied from 15s.2d. to 18s. 4d.61 This amount can be used as an indication of what a working-class family would have earned in agricultural Wallingford. Thus, we can propose, in line with Crompton’s arguments, that based on CPH in WUCH, the children potentially had better access to food and necessities than working-class homes in Wallingford could afford. As Bevan claimed, ‘thousands of agricultural labourers need to feed a family with a money less than one child costs in one of the pauper palaces.62

Behlmer argues that how some middle-class humanitarians believed that it was children’s rights to have the opportunity to enjoy childhood.63 In WUCH most children received leisure activities and had the chance to enjoy childhood. The records of the recreation funds highlight how every year WUCH received between £1 and £4 from local benefactors. This money was used to buy sports equipment, rides at the fair, fireworks, Christmas trees and various other things designed to enhance the children’s experience.64 Also, special occasions like Christmas were celebrated in WUCH. The records show how:

Santa Claus was very punctual in his first visit to the cottage homes, and everyone got a very filled stocking. The homes have been decorated and the midday meal was substantial.65

The children also received numerous treats and gifts. They were able to attend trips, shows and sporting events. All these were donated and organised by the local benefactors.66

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62 Bevan, p. 12.
65 *Berks and Oxon Advertiser*, 28 December 1900.
benefactors could have also been seen as one source of family socialization for the children.67 On the other hand, the benefactors, lady visitors and guardians could have wanted to be seen as heroes, as all this evidence is from the reports that were published for public circulation. Also, showing children’s lives and achievements publicly could have been done to increase donations. This can be seen in 1907 during the summer holidays, when an exhibition was set to display the children’s work. This then became a yearly tradition.68

However, not everyone had an enjoyable experience in WUCH. Tomkins argues that ‘in the home or orphanages children usually had to submerge their personality’.69 Henrick additionally argues how ‘society attempted to shape the young people in accordance its own visionary model’.70 Sommerville adds that ‘society standardised the childhood that provided “a childhood for everyone” even if it meant squeezing them into a mould’.71 Similarly, WUCH sent children to other institutions if they did not obey the rules. One girl who was a ‘decidedly bad influence’ was sent to Cavendish training school during 1901.72 Again, during 1907–1908, two girls were sent to a workhouse and from there to industrial schools for bad behaviour.73 Later on in 1913–1914, some girls were sent to other homes for misconduct and the Superintendent wrote ‘hope they will make a good use of the chances given to them and make a fresh start in life’.74

69 Tomkins, p. 12.
72 BRO: G/W/4/4/1, Cottage Homes Annual Report, 1900–1901.
The purpose of this chapter was to determine the impact cottage homes staff had on its children and if they were able to offer a family environment in WUCH. The fast turnover and unqualified FMs could have impacted relationships and trust with children, but it must be noted that the twenty-seven-year service of the Superintendent and Matron would have bought continuity in WUCH. There are signs that the FMs cared for the children and were willing to challenge what they saw as ill-treatment to the children, albeit with little success. However, there was not a substantial change or improvement in how children were treated over the duration of this study. Many children had positive experiences, yet there are some children for whom the cottage home was not a caring family environment. There were signs of affection and the children’s well-being was cared for, which enabled children to experience elements designed to help them enjoy their childhood. This could indicate that some elements of the family were in place for many of its children, therefore helping them innately, arguably more so than maintaining a life outside WUCH in extreme poverty. So, the children were recovered from the pauper taint as they were ‘cradled by the family…whether it is loved or loathed’, even if WUCH was not able to replicate the exact family environment for all the children.75

75 Davidoff and others, p. 55.
Chapter 4: Orderly Citizen and Useful Servants

The children receive such a care and instruction at the Homes as may enable them to become self-respecting citizens, and the best evidence of the Cottage Homes system is that when children go out into the world they seem very seldom drift back into workhouses.

The quotation above was given by Superintendent Longhurst in 1914. It gives an idea of society’s expectations for the cottage homes system. By the start of the twentieth century, poor law institutions had a priority to ensure that children who left them went on to gain and succeed in keeping respectable occupations, due to the schooling and training they provided. The aim was to stop the cycle of children becoming a burden to the state and to ensure their moral reformation. This chapter will examine if WUCH was able to live up to these expectations and consequently children were freed from the ‘stigma’.

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4 Murdoch, p. 257.

The children received schooling outside the gates of WUCH, in the community with other children, and they did well in their achievements. As E.C. Tuffnell wrote, in 1845, ‘There is not the lightest difficulty getting rid of pauper children if they are properly educated’. By the late nineteenth century it was recognised that it was better to educate pauper children with the rest of children from the community. Mrs Nassau Senior offered a woman’s view to this debate and recommended, in 1874:

The Pauper child must take his place…beside the independent workman’s child.

Only thus would the stigma of pauperism be removed and only thus could integration into the working community be assured.

In the late nineteenth century children from Wallingford’s workhouse attended the National School in the town, with varied results. Children were often absent from school and the relationship between the school and WUCH seemed fragile. The school was criticised at the start of the century due to the low standards of writing and lack of military drills, which could have been due to the school also suffering from a high turnover of staff. Although, Digby observes, pauper education in workhouse schools in Norfolk influenced building ‘a more stable society’ and, in some workhouses, the teaching was particularly good. However, it must be noted that her study was based on an earlier

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7 Ross, p. 2.
10 BRO: D/P/37/28/2, Wallingford Church of England Schools Minute Book, 19 March 1908, 16 November 1908; SCH 22/8/2, January 1899, February 1900.
period than this study. All children over the age of four continued to attend the National School after they moved to WUCH from the workhouse in April 1900. The circumstances around the school seemed to improve in line with national trends, as the enforcement of the 1902 New Education Act, the 1906 Education Act and the Children Act of 1908 all gradually improved both education standards and conditions at schools. Limbrick agrees that education had improved from the workhouse education in just a few decades. Similarly, the Wallingford National School teaching staff improved and the school maintained good levels of teaching; additionally, the class subjects were also revised and improved. The children from WUCH attended school regularly and did well at school, receiving eighteen prizes for their achievements. As the Chaplain of WUCH praised, ‘the children from the homes are more intelligent and attentive than children from outside’. One of the boys from WUCH even succeeded in attending grammar school.

However, some cottage homes children across England felt the stigma of being in institutional care at school, as one girl’s memories from the 1940s recalls, ‘we did speak to other children at school, but some outside children would not come near you. There was a stigma about being a kid from the homes’. One of the reasons could have been their differentiated uniform; Ross describes the uniform as ‘clumsy and uncomfortable boots…the cropped hair of both boys and girls…the workhouse made clothes, and the

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12 BRO: D/P/37/28/2, 24 January 1900, BRO: G/W/10/1 Wallingford Union Cottage Homes Indoor Relief List 1900–1905.


17 Limbrick, Inside the gates, p. 49.
“unwholesome smell”\(^\text{18}\). However, the children’s uniform in WUCH was not as easily recognised. The girls made only their pinafores, as their other clothes were bought from the same suppliers that the middle-class used in town.\(^\text{19}\) It may have been the case that the WUCH children were better dressed as their uniform was also meticulously cleaned, possibly more so than pauper children outside the homes. According to William Chance in 1897, ‘the despised pauper child is infinitely superior in obedience, cleanliness, and its regularity, to the class of children it meets in the school it is sent to’.\(^\text{20}\) Sometimes children living in the community, in poor circumstances, were sent home because of their dirty appearance, and they were not clean enough to be in the class with other children.\(^\text{21}\)

The children in WUCH received industrial training for them to earn their own living, secure respectable positions and thus gain their place in society.\(^\text{22}\) Whilst this training prepared children for trades that were already declining, Lady visitor to WUCH, Alice L. Hedges, implied ‘we can only trust the excellent training and individual care they receive at the home will be repaid by their becoming useful and capable in the future’.\(^\text{23}\) During 1902, WUCH received an industrial grant that was paid to the Superintendent and Matron Longhurst.\(^\text{24}\) The Superintendent taught the boys carpentry, gardening and bee keeping, whereas the Matron taught the girls cooking, housework, sewing and needlework

\(^{18}\) Ross, pp. 16–17.

\(^{19}\) BRO: G/W/4/1-2, Minutes of Cottages Homes Committee 1900–1915; BRO: G/W/4/4/1; BRO: G/W/1/28, pp. 284–285.


\(^{22}\) Murdoch, p. 141; Sheldon, p. 268.


\(^{24}\) BRO: G/W/1/28, Wallingford Guardian Minutes, 17 June 1902.
in preparation for domestic service. 25 Murdoch claims these occupations belonged to ‘the English pre-industrial past’. 26 However, Hollen notes these occupations were still respectable in the eyes of the middle-class. 27 Also, girls over ten years of age had a plot of garden to look after, where the boys were also able to keep rabbits. 28 The children had good training facilities in WUCH; the girls were provided with sewing machines, which could indicate that WUCH tried to prepare them for other jobs involving sewing, and boys had a carpentry workshop. Superintendent Longhurst claimed ‘the carpentry workshop is particularly important in the aid in employment and amusement of the older boys’. 29

The girls’ option was mainly domestic training in WUCH, whereas boys had wider scope. The focus on national health, child mortality and strengthening the nation’s ‘stock’, increased the domestic training amongst the girls. 30 Perhaps the domestic training was designed to supply cheap and obedient domestic servants for middle-class, or was it also a way of spreading middle-class domestic ideology and was domestic service seen as a way to respectability? 31 Some scholars agree that girls received worse training than boys and their future was less promising. 32 Zmroczek points out: ‘domestic skills and “correct”

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26 Murdoch, p. 123.
27 Murdoch, p. 128.
28 BRO: G/W/4/4/1, Cottage Homes Annual Report, 1901.
29 BRO: G/W/4/1, Minutes of Cottage Homes Committee, 17 July 1900; BRO: G/W/4/4/1, Cottage Homes Annual Report, 1901.
30 Horn, The Victorian and Edwardian School Child, p. 49; Zmorczek, p. 126.
32 Sheldon, p. 44; Horn, The Victorian Town Child, p. 189.
moral values were more important for the girls than intellectual achievements’. As Mrs Nassau Senior wrote in 1874:

A girl is not necessarily a better woman because she knows the height of the mountain of Europe…but she is decidedly better fitted for the duties she will be called upon to perform in life, if she knows how to wash and tend a child, cook… and clean house.34

Davin notes that the ‘children’s lives were affected by the prevailing (or changing) division of labour in both paid and unpaid work’.35 Tufnell earlier commented in 1874, how ‘The girls in the schools are not benefitted equally with the boys’.36 It is worth noting, however, that Jenkins’ study of working-class domesticity based on autobiographies revealed that some women saw this role ‘as positive goal’.37

As early as the 1830s it was noticed that children from the workhouse were ill-prepared for employment in the ‘real world’.38 Some of the problems the girls faced were not knowing how to cook smaller quantities of food, use better cuts of meat, or use utensils, which made it challenging to adjust to life outside of institutions.39 Bryant claims the girls would have received better training in artisan homes working as ‘little mothers’

33 Zmorcze, p. 318.
compared to scattered homes.\textsuperscript{40} However, this could have been mainly avoided in WUCH as it was a small setting, which could have mirrored a more regular household and would have made it easier for girls to adjust. Girls would have been confident looking after children and most of them had bank accounts, which would have made them comfortable handling money.\textsuperscript{41} Yet there were skills that the girls would have lacked, for instance, how to do the grocery shopping, as it was all sent directly from the suppliers, based on an agreed dietary table.\textsuperscript{42} To make certain that the girls received adequate training to secure positions, they had a chance to stay an extra year in WUCH after they finished school. As Superintendent Longhurst wrote:

Girls should have some preliminary training to render them to fit to keep situations when obtained, even if this means the need to keep girls in the home after they have finished school – better to keep them so they will become useful servants.\textsuperscript{43}

He also suggested that the girls will be split in two cottages and they will carry out most of the cleaning and laundry as a form of industrial training.\textsuperscript{44} Murdoch points out that this was normal at the beginning of the century when girls were used as manual, unskilled labourers for the general upkeep of the cottages.\textsuperscript{45} Mr Beever, from the Henley Union, wrote and complemented that WUCH ‘were great as regarded the training of the children. They were great trainers…they should be satisfied in the future what they had done’.\textsuperscript{46} All this

\textsuperscript{40} Nina Bryant, ‘Remaking the Pauper: The Efficacy of the Scattered Children’s Homes of the Camberwell St Giles’ Poor Law Union, 1898–1914 (unpublished master’s dissertation, Open University, 2019), pp. 62–63.


\textsuperscript{42} BRO: G/W/1/28, Wallingford Guardian’s Minutes, 3 July 1900.

\textsuperscript{43} BRO: G/W/4/4/2, Cottage Homes Annual Report, 1902–1903, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{44} BRO: G/W/4/1, Minutes of Cottage Homes Committee, 15 January 1904.

\textsuperscript{45} Murdoch, pp. 128–129.

\textsuperscript{46} Reading Observer, 14 May 1904, p. 7.
evidence demonstrates that even if there was a division of labour between the girls and boys, as Davin suggested, the schooling and training that children received in WUCH would have made a difference to the chances children got to gain an occupation after they left the homes.

*Life after the Cottage Homes*

The aim of the children’s poor law institutions was to produce ‘orderly citizens and useful servants’. Although, Murdoch points out, the poor law unions failed to place some children in positions after leaving institutions, and even fewer children started in the trade that they were trained for.⁴⁷ Conversely, it can be suggested that WUCH successfully placed the boys and girls in positions after leaving the home, even if boys ended up in different skilled trades than those for which they were trained, as they had more options available to them.⁴⁸ In WUCH the two main economical solutions for placing or ‘rescuing’ the girls and boys were domestic service and fishing apprenticeships. A simple statistical analysis based on WUCH’s servants and apprenticeship lists 1904–1915, highlights this. The WUCH lists consist of fifty children, twenty-four girls and twenty-six boys. It must be noted that the first three years of data are missing, which can cause a small bias to the analysis. The evidence shows that 77% of boys became fishing apprentices in Grimsby. The boys struggled to find positions in the artisan trades that they trained for, making the army and mercantile marine other popular alternatives.⁴⁹ Only two boys became butchers, and another two boys went into the army. Just one boy went to the training ship in Exmouth, even if the local newspaper wrote an appealing article about how one boy had

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⁴⁷ Murdoch, p. 137.
⁴⁸ Sheldon, p. 270.
⁴⁹ Murdoch, p. 136.
made £1000 by the age of forty after receiving training there.\textsuperscript{50} The majority of the girls, 83\%, ended up as servants, one got married and another girl became a laundress.\textsuperscript{51}

The results from WUCH are like those reported by Ashford poor law institution between 1888–1893. It claimed it was training boys for careers as blacksmiths, shoemakers, and tailors but as in WUCH, most of them found work in other areas, as seen in Figure 4A.

Figure 4A: Boys leaving Ashford, West London School District, 1888–1893, for service.\textsuperscript{52}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fishermen</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pageboys</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakers</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army Bands</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailors</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoemakers</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacksmiths</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Victorian era led to rises in living standards, creating demand for domestic servants. It was seen as a sign of ‘respectability and status’, but also a necessity for the arduous demands of the middle- and upper-class households.\textsuperscript{53} Consequently, this became

\textsuperscript{50} Henley & South Oxford Standard, 2 March 1906, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{51} G/W/4/4/1-8 Cottage Homes Annual Report, 1900–1915.

\textsuperscript{52} Murdoch, p. 137.

the main destination for girls leaving the school. In 1911, out of 611 girls leaving London’s poor law institutions, 595 went into domestic service. Even if the girls preferred other options, there was no other viable alternative for employment in Wallingford, like some other major towns and cities had. By 1901, domestic service was the largest means of employment in the country for women, with one and half million female servants. The demand for servants in Wallingford at the start of the century was still high, as it was estimated that one household in six in rural Berkshire had servants. Girls received lodging, food, uniforms, and small payments, whilst the guardians also benefitted from the girls’ continued supervision as the employers were responsible for the girls. Also, this was seen by the Guardians, as a way of keeping the girls away from their families and their potentially negative influence. However, WUCH offered a different approach and placed girls locally, thus making it easier for them to stay connected with their families and friends. This can be seen when Superintendent Longhurst wrote how he needs to visit ‘various destinations to see children in situations throughout the neighbourhood’. WUCH’s Chaplain, Samuel L. Cox, noted that ‘some of the former inmates who are in situations in this neighbourhood seem to get on very well’…and it ‘gives them a start they would not otherwise obtain in fighting the battle of relief’.

54 Davin, p.150.
55 Horn, Life Below Stairs, p. 10.
58 Murdoch, p. 140; Horn, The Rise and the Fall of the Victorian Servant, p. 36.
59 BRO: G/W/1/31, Wallingford Guardians Minutes, 20 February 1906.
The girls from WUCH were placed in large households because of their education and training. Some scholars argue that children from poor law institutions were exploited by families of ‘relatively humble means’ and were not able to secure good positions. However, it is believed that the girls from WUCH avoided Mrs Beeton’s description of the general servant destiny: ‘life was a solitary one…her work was never done.’ The Superintendent proudly wrote that some of the girls were parlour maids or housemaids. The extensive training in needlework and the good quality products that the girls produced would have helped them to secure these roles. Chance wrote that the girls could have provided skilled labour as they had industrial training and how ‘girls from institutions have demand for them as they have qualities of honesty and a habit of cleanliness which children from ordinary homes don’t have’. One of the successes was Ethel Calladine from WUCH, who was able to join her mother as a servant in the affluent Eyston family’s manor house, in East Hendred, only eight miles away from WUCH. Bigger households gave the girls an opportunity to progress and earn better salaries. This could have given the girls an insight into and potentially inspiration for better kind of life. As Clara Collet wrote in 1892, being a servant ‘offers chances of making friends and having abiding interest’. Also, some servants had warm relationships with their employers and learned

61 Zmorczek, p. 402.

62 Horn, Life Below Stairs, p. 11; Limbrick, p. 46.


66 Chance, pp. 256–257.


skills that they could use in their own lives. As one of the employers recorded in her memoirs of having servants: ‘Despite the great social differences we were genuinely fond of them’. 70

Sending boys to apprenticeships in Grimsby solved WUCH’s problem of finding the boys positions after leaving the home. The official report noted how Grimsby fishing apprenticeships were seen as the poor law union’s solution to ‘disposing of the rougher classes of pauper boys…and an apprenticeship to the fishing trade is their last chance’. 71 This is in contrast to the boys from WUCH who were described as very industrious and capable. 72 Boys needed ‘stamina’ to cope in the hard conditions on the sea. 73 Mr Carrington, the representative of the apprenticeships in Grimsby and the manager of the homes, admired what ‘good lads’ the WUCH boys were and expressed how he would like to have more of them to come to Grimsby. 74 Hall claims that the fishermen, also, preferred boys from institutions as they were ‘amenable to discipline’. 75 One of these boys was Peter Aldridge from WUCH, about whom Superintendent Longhurst commented, ‘he met us at the station, he was well dressed in a dark suit with a watch and a chain. He looked well and happy and has grown tall and likes work’. Peter was also described by the captain

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70 Horn, Life Below Stairs, p. 16.


74 BRO: G/W/1/31, Wallingford Guardians Minutes, 26 May 1907.

as ‘such a good lad’.\textsuperscript{76} Compared to Chance’s report of one third of the apprentices absconding, all but one of the WUCH boys finished their apprenticeships.\textsuperscript{77}

It is suggested that fishing apprenticeships were economically beneficial options for all parties involved.\textsuperscript{78} Evidence clearly shows that the agreement was favourable for WUCH, as a premium of a mere £5.5s was required to send a boy to Grimsby.\textsuperscript{79} Additionally, most of the boys from WUCH managed to save some of their money, and some even had the opportunity to earn good money, for example, John Emmons from WUCH who left his apprenticeship in 1915 with £7 savings, and his last ‘stocker bait’ payment from the left-over fish which was a substantial £3.6s.10d.\textsuperscript{80} However, the boys often spent their money on their days off, as the temptations of pubs and shops emptied their pockets and they returned to the ship empty handed, sometimes still drunk, wearing their best clothes.\textsuperscript{81} Lane’s study of apprenticeships in England 1600–1914 notes how the apprenticeship could have ‘provided stability for the child, a secure future with guaranteed employment’.\textsuperscript{82} Peter was not the only influential success that the boys in WUCH heard, as other apprentices returned to visit with their stories of the life in Grimsby and on the boat. They were so influential that the Superintendent said, ‘one desire of every boy in the homes is to become a North Sea fisherman’.\textsuperscript{83} One of these boys, George Atkins,

\textsuperscript{76}BRO: G/W/1/31, Wallingford Guardians Minutes, 26 May 1907.

\textsuperscript{77}Chance, p. 279; NEA, 208/1/12–13, Fishing Apprentice Register.


\textsuperscript{79}BRO: G/W/1/33, Wallingford Guardians Minutes, 27 April 1909.

\textsuperscript{80}Fowler, p. 145; NEA: 208/1/12-13, Fishing Apprentice Register, 1900–1915.

\textsuperscript{81}NEA: 208/1/12-13, Fishing Apprentice Register, 1900–1915.


\textsuperscript{83}BRO: G/W/4/4/6, Cottage Homes Annual Report, 1908–1909.
expressed he ‘wishes to go to the sea’. A further four boys left for Grimsby during that year.84

It can be suggested that WUCH continued to keep watch over the boys and there were people at least partly in loco parentis for the boys in Grimsby. Superintendent Longhurst took the boys to Grimsby to start their apprenticeship, which gave him an opportunity to check their lodging and placement. He also visited them later during their apprenticeship. The commitment to the boys is demonstrated by the WUCH committee declining to join the Befriending of Boys association because ‘those who are sent out are carefully watched by the committee’.85 Also, Mr Garrington initially interviewed and placed the boys from WUCH with the North Eastern Steam Fishing Company, and he reviewed and checked on boys’ progress regularly.86 All the boys stayed in 43 Orwell Street in Grimsby, which had a landlady who cleaned and repaired their clothes, and also kept an eye on the boys on shore and seemed to have cared for them. However, she was not pleased with James Hitchman and his drunken mess when he raided the larder.87 Additionally, the boys were able to visit the Fisher Lads’ Institute free of charge, which was conveniently located close by on Orwell Street. They had access there to swimming baths, a gymnasium, workshops, a reading room, and a library.88 This contrasts with Emmerson’s findings on apprentices in Grimsby before the start of the twentieth century. He argues that the boys were exploited by fishing companies, and the guardians stopped


85 BRO: G/W/4/4/6, Cottage Homes Annual Report, 10 October 1911.

86 BRO: G/W/1/31, Wallingford Guardians Minutes, 17 May 1905, 26 May 1907; Nort East Lincolnshire Archives (NEA): 208/1/12-13, Fishing Apprentice Register.

87 NEA: 208/1/12-13, Fishing apprentice Register, 2 June 1912.

88 Chance, p. 276,
looking after boys when they signed them over. Yet, as Crompton points out, towards the end of the nineteenth century apprenticeships were done with more ‘care and humanity’ and children were placed in better conditions with their progress being monitored by the guardians. Furthermore, in 1883, the Merchant Shipping Act strove to provide more protection for the apprentices. Not only were WUCH successfully producing ‘orderly citizens and useful servants’, but also, Knox’s argument that the solution was ‘economically rational for both employer and apprentice’ seems to be relevant in WUCH for both boys and girls.

What is the Fruit of our Work?

Poor law institutions worked to ensure that children had a position to go to when they left their walls. According to Sheldon, this was the ultimate test if the ‘reformation of character’ had been successful. In addition, the unions had a responsibility to ensure the children continued to ‘do well’ in their placements. It must be also noted when using formal reports as evidence, that they may be biased to this end. To ascertain whether WUCH successfully achieved this, analysis of WUCH’s data will be compared to that of William Chance from 1878. He argued that ‘children were depauperized’ as they were doing well in their positions. Not only is a large part of Macnamara’s 1908 report based

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89 Emmerson, p. 20, p. 44.
90 Crompton, p. 213, p. 223.
91 Emmerson, p. 20.
93 Sheldon, p. 267.
94 Sheldon, p. 268.
95 Chance, p. 329.
on the same data, but Sheldon also uses these reports in her study. It must be noted that the categories’ classifications differ in these reports; however, it is still possible to see if the children were doing well, recorded as satisfactory, which was the success rate of the system, or not doing well and so recorded as unsatisfactory. The analysis will therefore only focus on the four main categories of classification: ‘Doing very well’, ‘Doing fairly well’, ‘Not doing well, and ‘Other’ (see Figures 4B to 4I below). The ‘Other’ category includes all other classifications, for instance; children leaving, and those who were lost, emigrated, married or dead. It is worth of noting how the ‘classification of the children’ outcomes hides another side of judgemental attitudes towards them. The analysis highlights that children from WUCH continued to prosper after leaving the home, compared to other poor law institutions, but there is a gender divide in the results as boys tended to outperform girls, as previously discussed. As Sheldon argues, boys ‘had a better chance of doing well with wider scope of employments open to them’. 96

All institutions in this analysis reported positive results. This could, however, have been in order to achieve the 80% success rate, set by the poor law institution officials and inspectors.97 WUCH claimed that 88% of children did well, or better, after leaving the home. Furthermore, analysis shows that 20% of the children did very well, which was in large part due to the success of the apprenticeships in Grimsby, as all of these children were recorded in the ‘very well’ category.98 A further 4% of children were recorded as doing fairly well, with ‘The Other’ category consisting of 8% of the study, just two children who had no report, one who returned home and the other who moved to live with

96 Sheldon, p. 270.
97 Sheldon, p. 269.
friends (Figures 4B and 4C). It must be noted that WUCH is the only institution that has a category of children doing very well, and there are no children recorded doing badly.

Figure 4B: WUCH children’s success rate after leaving homes, 1904–1915. 99

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doing very well</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>20%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doing well</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing fairly well</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4C: WUCH children’s success rate after leaving homes.

The analysis shows that there was, indeed, a difference, between the girls’ and boys’ success rates after leaving WUCH, with the boys being recorded as only doing very well or well. On the other hand, the girls’ records show that, whilst the overall trend was positive, only 75% did very well or well. Only girls were recorded as doing fairly well or have entries in the ‘other’ category, which is shown in Figures 4D, 4E, 4F and 4G.

Figure 4D: WUCH’s boys’ success rate after leaving homes 1904–1915.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doing very well</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing well</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing fairly well</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4E: WUCH boys’ success rate after leaving homes.

Figure 4F: WUCH girls’ success rate after leaving the homes, 1904–1915.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doing very well</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing well</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing fairly well</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

100 BRO: G/W/4/4/1-8, Cottage Homes Annual Reports, 1904–1915.

The WUCH analysis can be compared to data from Macnamara’s report of 1908, which recorded 3223 girls who left the Metropolitan District schools in 1906. This highlighted most of the children’s conduct as satisfactory or fairly satisfactory. However, some girls were classified as unsatisfactory, bad or unfit for the service they chose, which for the purpose of comparison in this study, is combined into the same category (Figures 4H and 4I). The ‘Other’ section included girls in training homes, lost, with relations and those who refused visits. These categories potentially highlight some of the problems city schools had with children not receiving adequate training and education, or the economic reasons that drove girls back home to support their families.\textsuperscript{102} It is evident that both institutions, WUCH and the Metropolitan District, claimed children were successful in their positions, although the WUCH report was more positive compared to that of the Metropolitan District. However, there are signs that the success was more prevalent in boys compared to girls.

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Figure 4H: Girls’ success rate after leaving Metropolitan District, 1906. ¹⁰³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>1729</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly satisfactory</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory or bad/unfit for service</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4I: Girl’s success rate after leaving Metropolitan District.

Conclusion

This chapter has identified that children received a good education in the Wallingford National school outside the gates of the WUCH, had access to good facilities and received industrial training in line with other institutions. The trades for which they were trained, however, were already in decline. These factors helped the girls to obtain better servant positions that were close by their friends and families. As Knox notes, the guardians,

¹⁰³ PP. 1908 (18) T.J. Macnamara *Children under the Poor Law: A Report to the President of the Local Government Board.*
employers, and the boys in WUCH mutually agreed for boys to be sent to Grimsby for apprenticeships. All the boys did well in their apprenticeships, furthermore, when compared to other national institutions, WUCH children’s conduct is positive, and the children were able to support themselves successfully due to the training and support they received. This allowed WUCH to succeed in the ultimate test of children recovering from the ‘pauper taint’ by stopping children being a burden for society.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Taking into account the challenge that there are limited studies about cottage homes, a relatively broad approach was adopted to introduce these less-studied children and provide a deeper insight into cottage homes. This study has been one of the first attempts to examine whether separating children from their families and moving them to a simulated family setting, together with school and training, was enough to set them on the road to success. Avoiding their becoming a burden on society when they left the institution was the ultimate test of whether the children had recovered from the pauper taint. The findings of this local study challenge the majority of the historiography of poor law institutions, as it paints a rather positive view of the cottage homes. Other local studies are needed in order to determine if this study is reflective of the national picture. It is unfortunate that this limited study was not able to include the concept of religion, which would be another fruitful area for further work. In addition, a demographic analysis would give a detailed economic and social view of Wallingford and its people. In order to remain focused on ‘history from below’, however, this study has chosen to centre on the children and their experiences.

The recent historiography supports this study’s findings in challenging the view of the ‘ragged children’. Contrary to the concept of ‘nobody’s children’, this study confirms most of the children were indeed ‘somebody’s’ children, who stayed in WUCH longer than in other comparable institutions. WUCH preferred to accommodate older children, potentially as they were easier to look after, but the children’s ages varied. This, together with a declining number of older girls, led to challenges in coping with the demands and the upkeep of the cottage homes. It is also evident that some of these parents chose to place the children into WUCH as a form of support. The results highlight the sad reality of the struggles that mothers faced when losing the main earner of the family. A limitation of this
study is the small sample size and the continuity of records. Notwithstanding this limitation, the study shows that some children were able to keep in contact with their families; however, the first test of recovery from pauper taint was achieved in WUCH, by successfully removing children from the influence of the adults in the workhouse and of their parents.

The second test was to explore if WUCH was able to create a family environment for the children. This was difficult to determine due to limited sources and mixed views from the children themselves. Many children were able to follow the set rules, or to fit to the mould, and found that life in WUCH was sometimes more caring than their own homes. But there is also evidence to suggest that this was not the case for all children. Children generally had a good quality of life in WUCH, which allowed them to enjoy their childhoods, and was often aided by the generosity of Wallingford’s middle and upper classes. The strenuous work FMs had in looking after fifteen and sometimes more children in overcrowded spaces led to many of them leaving very shortly after they arrived. This would have impacted the stability of the home and ability to create a family environment. However, Superintendent and Matron Longhurst’s long service would have counteracted in some extent the high turnover of FMs. WUCH succeeded in the second test of aiding the recovery of the children from pauper taint, as the children were ‘cradled by the family’, even if it was not able to create an exact family environment.

Children had the opportunity to do well in WUCH. They attended the National school, and it is evident that WUCH focused on giving the children training and guidance to succeed in their positions after they left the cottage homes. Most of the girls became servants and were placed in bigger households, which would have given them better chances of progression and potentially lighter workloads. Also, the placements were near to WUCH, which would have enabled the girls to stay in touch with their friends and families. Although the boys had more career choices available, most of them chose to go to
Grimsby as fishing apprentices. Similarly, the boys did well in their apprenticeships, which challenges the current historiography of children’s negative experiences. Knox’s argument that placements were beneficial for all parties could be seen as relevant for both the boys and girls of WUCH.¹ The reports of their conduct were positive and most of the children did very well in their positions. The Superintendent’s annual reports show the pride he had for the children who had followed the system and succeeded in their positions. Superintendent Longhurst burst with admiration when mentioning the examples of Ethel Calladine and Peter Aldridge. This shows that the last test, to determine if WUCH were able to help the children to recover from the ‘pauper taint’ was successful, as the children were able to support themselves. They followed Edith Sellers’ suggestion, and the children took their chances and they succeeded.²


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