

Children's Homes and Children in Care

A guide to sources held at Birmingham Archives and Heritage



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Introduction

This guide was produced as part of the Birmingham Children's Homes Project, which ran from November 2009 to December 2010 and was supported by Birmingham City Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund. The aims of the project were twofold: first, to collect oral histories and other materials to build up a new collection which can be used by researchers; and secondly, to catalogue all the surviving records of children's homes which are kept at Birmingham Archives & Heritage (BA&H). Two members of staff were employed to work on the project: an oral historian, Gudrun Limbrick, who found participants and interviewed them, and carried out research for the project; and an archivist, Sarah Pymmer, who catalogued the records to make them accessible by researchers.

The first part of this guide covers the records collected and created by the Birmingham Children's Homes Project, which include oral history interviews and photographs.

The second part of this guide covers records kept at BA&H which relate to children's homes run by Birmingham City Council. This part of the guide mainly gives information relating to children's homes and approved schools, but it also contains some information on other records relating to children in care held by BA&H.

Further details about all the items covered in this guide can be found in their individual catalogues, which can be accessed in the BA&H searchroom or online at <http://calmview.birmingham.gov.uk>.

The Birmingham Children's Homes Project, 2009-2010

The project

The Birmingham Children's Homes Project was a project supported by Birmingham City Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund which ran from November 2009 until December 2010. The project was intended to capture memories of former residents and staff of Birmingham City Council children's homes, and to collect, catalogue and make available records relating to the homes. The project concentrated on the time period 1948-1990 – beginning at the Children Act 1948 and continuing to the implementation of the Children Act 1989 – although some items relating to periods before and after this time were also collected. All the material collected is preserved at BA&H, catalogued under the reference MS 2838, and made available to researchers in the secure searchroom.

Many former looked-after children approach Birmingham City Council with queries about their time in care; sadly, the survival of individual case records of children in care from before the 1980s is haphazard, as standard procedure at that time was to destroy case files once the child was an adult. Occasional early files do survive, but many people find that their individual records no longer exist. A parallel problem is that the records of individual homes were not preserved in a systematic way; as shown in the second part of this guide, the survival of records from individual homes is patchy at best.

Against this background, the Children's Homes Project was designed to bring out from volunteer contributors the hidden histories of life in Birmingham's children's homes. The project gathered together a range of materials, including oral histories and photographs, and ensured they would be looked after and made accessible for the future. These materials allow researchers to see how life in a children's home was perceived by both the children who lived there and the staff who worked there. Furthermore, former looked-after children can access the oral histories, as a spur to their own memories, as a form of reminiscence, to validate their own experiences, or simply to compare their experiences with others'.

Unlike many oral history projects, which are undertaken with the aim of creating a book or website to interpret the information gathered, the Children's Homes Project was not primarily intended to produce a history of its subject. The main intention of the oral history strand of the Children's Homes Project was to collect interviews and memories and arrange for their permanent preservation, to allow other people to access them and draw their own conclusions.

During the project, a number of interviews were carried out with former residents and staff of Birmingham children's homes. Interviewees volunteered for the project, some after seeing the project in the media, others after hearing about it through word of mouth. The interviewees were visited by an oral historian, who recorded their memories of their time living or working in children's homes. The interviews were then transcribed. Some people who responded to the project could not be, or did not want to be, interviewed; they

wrote down their memories instead. These written histories are catalogued alongside the oral histories.

Why oral history?

Since the 1970s, oral history has grown to be an important means of “ordinary people” participating in making history, and is now a key part of community history. Oral history interviews can shed light on the day-to-day realities of life, which would never be recorded in “official” archives. A children’s home register may record the date on which a child was admitted, but it cannot show how the child was feeling, or what he or she thought of this new place. Oral history cannot fill in these gaps universally, but by recording the experiences of individuals it is possible to connect with this history in a more immediate way.

Subject to the access restrictions described below, the oral history interviews collected by the Birmingham Children’s Homes Project are available to be used by researchers or simply anyone with an interest in the subject.

Accessing interviews

These records are catalogued under the reference number MS 2838. Each interview has its own catalogue record. The record gives the interviewee’s initials (unless they have opted to remain anonymous), the date of the interview, the dates the interviewee talks about, and a summary of the major topics covered in the interview, to help researchers locate subjects which might be of interest to them.

Recordings and transcripts

Each recorded interview has a master version, which is stored on computer in a format which meets archival preservation standards. If the interview has no parts which are closed (see below), there will be a listening copy available to users in the searchroom. The master recording is transcribed (and where necessary edited – see below), and this transcript is available to users in the searchroom.

Access conditions

Some interviews are completely closed, for data protection or other legal reasons; others have sections which are closed, usually where another person is or can be identified; and others are open in their entirety. Whether or not an interview is closed is clearly stated in its catalogue entry. Where interviews are closed, there is no public access to them for a certain number of years, and again, this will be stated in the catalogue. Where they are partially closed, access will be granted to an edited transcript. Where interviews are open, access will be granted to the listening copy or transcript.

Written histories collected by the project have also been edited, where necessary, to ensure that personally identifying information remains confidential. The edited copies are available in the searchroom. The closure period and date on which the full document will be opened are stated in the catalogue.

Interview subjects

The interviews did not always take the “life history” approach which is common in oral history; particularly among former residents, some of the interviews are more impressionistic recollections than clear narrative. Sometimes the structure of the interviews themselves can reflect the chaotic childhoods of the participants. The oral historian guided the interviewees to talk about their time living or working in children’s homes, and asked questions to prompt memories, while at the same time allowing the interviewee to direct the course of the interview.

It is important to remember that the former residents talked about their childhoods from the perspective of adulthood, and the memories recorded by the oral historian have been filtered through the subsequent life experiences of the interviewees. Each interview represents one person’s subjective experience, which may be very different even from that of someone who was a resident at the same home at the same time.

Interviewees were fairly evenly divided between former staff and former residents of children’s homes. The earliest memories came from someone who had been a resident at Erdington Cottage Homes before the Second World War, and the most recent recollections came from members of staff who had worked in children’s homes up until 2009. The recollections of former residents cover most of the time from about 1940 to about 1990, while the majority of former staff who responded had been working in homes from the 1970s onwards.

Homes represented in the oral history interviews include Erdington Cottage Homes, Shenley Fields Cottage Homes, Athelstan House, Southview, Tennal School, Reynoldstown Road, Pype Hayes Hall, Leach Green Lane, The Uplands, Bournbrook Road, Copeley Hill Hostel, Brooklands, Merrishaw Road, and Fountain Road. Homes which featured in written recollections included Marston Green Cottage Homes, Field House Residential Nursery, and Tennal School. Taken together, these interviews give an insight into the wide range of homes which were run by Birmingham City Council, and include the large cottage homes, small family group homes of 6-8 children, medium-sized homes of 16-18 children, a working children’s home, observation and assessment centres, a nursery, and an approved school.

The interviewees discussed all kinds of memories, good and bad, in their interviews. It was important to many of the former residents that they were able to talk about both negative and positive experiences, without being concerned that they would be asked to produce a one-sided or overly rosy picture of life in care. Once again, it is important to note that the project was not intended to interpret the oral histories, but to collect and preserve them so that readers or listeners can draw their own conclusions.

Below are some examples of the kinds of memories that interviewees shared. The transcripts for all of these interviews are available to read at BA&H.

Going into a home

Former residents often shared their memories of arriving at a children's home. Seen through a child's eyes, being taken into care was often a frightening and confusing experience. These three interviewees all entered residential care in the 1950s.

“We were walking into the gates and I [was] took into the house on the left, which was reception. And a woman took me in there, I was sobbing my heart up and she said, you'll be all right here my dear as they do. And she gave me a biscuit and a cup of milk and sat me in a room... When she left they just left me there, I just felt I don't know, bewildered like any small child would. You sit there and you're thinking, well what's this place?”¹

“My memory is I went in a Black Maria. I can describe that vividly inside. I was about four or five at this time and it's a vivid memory. There was like a wooden section – you sat in a section where you couldn't see in front of you and it went up to the ceiling... Obviously I was frightened in the Black Maria. I don't remember anything about arriving at the home...”²

“I remember I'd just had my sixth birthday or it seemed like that and then we came to be taken away from our house... I know that on at least two or three occasions we'd evaded capture if you like, by hiding around the house and what have you when these people came for us... But eventually they did catch up with us and from my memory it was sort of several policemen and obviously people from the Birmingham Council or whatever and then they took us away in a, it was a big black cab. I don't know whether that was a police car or it was an actual black cab you know, I don't know.”³

Some members of staff also had difficult introductions to a new home. This housemother describes her first morning after taking over from the previous houseparents:

“The youngest wouldn't move, she was under her blankets... She was a black girl, her hair, her thick hair was matted. It was absolutely, it hadn't been looked after it was in a terrible mess. But she was under the blankets and I said, come on lazy bones and pulled the blankets back and she covered her head with her hands. And I said I'm not going to hit you and she was crying and she said, I'm sorry, I'm sorry Aunty. And I said what for and she said I've wet my bed. It makes me cry to think of this wee girl. I said it doesn't matter, that's ok come on up you get and we'll give you a quick bath before breakfast. She said

¹ Interview with PC, MS 2838/1/14/3.

² Interview with RB, MS 2838/1/1/3.

³ Interview with MC, MS 2838/1/12/3.

please don't put me in a cold bath, because that's what she was used to."⁴

Another member of staff recalled the admission procedure vividly. He talks here about Athelstan House Observation and Assessment Centre in the 1970s, which had previously been a remand home and retained elements of its old, harsher regime:

"From the moment they walked through the door they were regimented. So they would be in a crocodile taken from the door and they would be processed in one room, their names, dates of birth and everything would be checked, they would then be paraded up the corridor, taken off all their clothes that they came in and changed or would be given a uniform which was a blue or green sort of t-shirt thing, a pair of corduroy trousers which were either blue or, or brown, a pair of pumps and a pair of shoes. They would be issued with a toothbrush, issued with a hairbrush, issued with a flannel and a towel and that was theirs, if they lost it they had to pay for it. It was like a prison and the towel had their name on or their number or both."⁵

Celebrations

Christmases and birthdays were highlights of the year for children in residential care, just as for other children. Some of the homes, particularly the cottage homes, were "sponsored" by local businesses, who would provide birthday and Christmas presents, provide parties, or pay for a trip to the pantomime or theatre.

These interviewees were in residential care in the 1950s:

"My brother's birthday's on Christmas day and he always got a leg of the turkey Christmas day and sat on the high table, so yeah they were always remembered. It was very good, I mean things like Easter, I was saying to my wife when we were talking years and years ago, that we never really missed out on anything. I probably went to the theatre and the pantomimes far more than she did when she was a youngster, so that you never missed out on anything."⁶

"I think they used to do you a cake for your birthday, I'm sure they did... I think you did get a card, I think we got a card and I think the kids made you one, they all put their name to it. I'm sure we did yeah, I think we had a card that was made by the kids and they all put their name on it, that was the only card I would have got I think."⁷

⁴ Interview with NB, MS 2838/1/22/3.

⁵ Interview with CA, MS 2838/1/3/3.

⁶ Interview with MC, MS 2838/1/12/3.

⁷ Interview with PC, MS 2838/1/14/3.

“Oh Christmas was lovely. Christmas was a good time in there because you had to make your own decorations and we used to put tissue flowers, tie them up, stick them and put them, go out and get the cane, the twigs off the trees and paint them gold or white. We used to paint them with poster paints, the thick paints dyed, thick paste, or spray and spray them. We used to paint them white or gold and they used to tie them on the stairs. Then you used to get your trimming, your crepe paper.”⁸

Former staff also had happy memories of Christmases spent with the children:

“[At Christmas] Bikes, prams, presents all donated, superb, honestly and when we used to sit round the dinner table they’d have a member of staff, whether you were a domestic, cook, or whatever, member of staff, a child, a member of staff. We’d sing all the hymns, all the carols, I mean, all the things and then we did games with them after, it was super.”⁹

“You know whoever was on the early shift would go and wake them all up you know playing Santa, who was there and everything. And they would come down and open all their presents and they’d have a lovely Christmas breakfast and a lovely Christmas dinner. Some used to, it was a shame some used to go home for home visits, but whoever was there they made sure they had a lovely Christmas. And birthdays they always have a party. They’d have a cake made specially, you know so yeah, those were lovely times.”¹⁰

Holidays

Another highlight of the year was the summer holiday. Most children’s homes arranged a week or two away for the children, often in Wales or on the south coast, while other homes chose to go for day trips. Large groups of children from the cottage homes were often accommodated in schools, whereas smaller groups might have gone camping or stayed in a holiday camp.

Former residents from the 1950s and 1960s recall their summer holidays:

“...we had fabulous holidays. We were well-fed, we went on trips, we went to the circus, the pictures, Drayton Manor, the parks, and we went on holiday. We went to Wales, Devon, Exmouth because we had a good housemother.”¹¹

⁸ Interview with PC, MS 2838/1/14/3.

⁹ Interview with UH and NM, MS 2838/1/10/3.

¹⁰ Interview with VA, MS 2838/1/11/3.

¹¹ Interview with RB, MS 2838/1/1/3.

“We used to go on holidays. I’ll tell you what we used to do, we used to go to Wales, to a school in the summer and all the desks in the classrooms, all the desks would be piled up at the back and we’d, we would have palliasses all on the floor with blankets and we used to have to make our own bed and we’d be there for the week and that was lovely.”¹²

“I remember, well my first holiday. My submarines, went down on a submarine, that was the first holiday I remember was Lee-on-the-Solent, Gosport, St Mary’s Bay. It was like an ex-army camp I suppose. All I remember it was like er... loads of sheds here and there... and the next holiday we had, was, well it was Skeggy, it’s Skegness Miners Camp now... an old fashioned camp... Oh, that was the camp, we went there and there was about four caravans on this site and that was it and it was just like a bomb building. Just four caravans plonked in the middle of nowhere and that was our holiday. I remember that one ‘cos that was boring one, that was really boring.”¹³

Staff also went on these holidays and, away from the routine of the home, they were often on duty 24 hours a day. Some holidays were more successful than others:

“...we took them to Edinburgh for the Edinburgh Festival for two weeks and it was one of the best children’s home holidays I have ever had... we camped for two weeks and we just went in and wandered round Edinburgh, you know looking at the street theatre, the jugglers and the joy that those kids got out of that was phenomenal, best holiday I’ve ever had, probably the best holiday I’ve ever had actually, let alone with children and we did the usual things, we went sightseeing...”¹⁴

“I remember one year’s, it was horrible, we went, it was on the south coast somewhere in the seventies, we’ve got about six black kids of this group of twenty five or whatever it was and it was really awful the way that, you know, that these kids were abused, ‘cos I was unfamiliar with racism at that time, I lived in Birmingham, you know, you didn’t get much of it here. But down in Eastbourne I think or wherever it was, you know, the attitude towards these black girls, horrible.”¹⁵

Other houseparents or officers in charge were happier to stay closer to home, and tried to stretch their holiday budget to last through the school holidays:

¹² Interview with SR, MS 2838/1/4/3.

¹³ Interview with PC, MS 2838/1/14/3.

¹⁴ Interview with CA, MS 2838/1/3/3.

¹⁵ Interview with CA, MS 2838/1/3/3.

“We used to hire a minibus for a month, and use that to go out and about for days. If the weather permitted it we would go somewhere in the minibus, we got around and you could take sort of... twelve kids and go out somewhere... The Wye Forest was always a good place to go, Drayton Manor, you could afford to take them then to Alton Towers, I mean it wasn't what it is now, but you could afford to take your kids to Alton Towers then.”¹⁶

One home was particularly adventurous:

“We took our kids to South of France. You know we took them to St Tropez... things that other children's homes hadn't done you know or daren't do. We drove down and took them to France two or three times.”¹⁷

Good and bad memories

Interviewees were asked to share both happy and unhappy memories of their time living or working in a children's home. Some people had positive memories overall, some had overwhelmingly negative memories, and others recalled both positive and negative events and feelings.

Three former residents recall contrasting views of Erdington Cottage Homes in the 1950s and 1960s:

“My brother did say to me once he used to lie awake at night. If he'd been told to do a job he'd lie awake worrying – did he do it right? Did he do it wrong? And he's a great explainer my brother and I asked him once, 'Why do you explain everything?' And he said, 'Because I don't want anyone to feel like I did. In the morning I didn't know if I'd done it right or if I'd done it wrong and I didn't want the consequences.’”¹⁸

“There was obviously rules, regulations, you broke them then there was a punishment but there was never any smacking or anything, I don't remember ever having been smacked or people being smacked and my memory of Miss Mills and Erdington Cottage Homes is nothing but good.”¹⁹

“It was awful, I hated it... It was just a bad atmosphere, I didn't like the aunts and none of them. I think they was too strict.”²⁰

¹⁶ Interview with PM and JM, MS 2838/1/5/3

¹⁷ Interview with OO, MS 2838/1/13/3.

¹⁸ Interview with RB, MS 2838/1/1/3.

¹⁹ Interview with MC, MS 2838/1/12/3.

²⁰ Interview with ML, MS 2838/1/16/3.

The memories of former staff were also a mix of positive and negative. Some staff remembered enjoying all their time at work, while others became disillusioned.

“I loved it, I absolutely, to me Pype Hayes was my second home.”²¹

“Yeah I think it’s much better for children if they can be placed with their parents, with you know a foster family... we tried to offer the best that we could in there under the circumstances, yeah, not ideal but we did the best we could.”²²

“I think at the time it was very, very successful and anybody, historically who knew the home would say it was, it was a lovely home and if you spoke to the children who lived there, I know that they would be sort of supportive of [it]...”²³

“I just know that I was in children’s homes for fourteen years and I think in effect, apart from the last sort of four or five, six years of it, I wasted my time because I took part in an oppressive regime which I really deeply regret, I wished I hadn’t and I don’t think I gained much from it...”²⁴

“It was lovely, I used to love going to work and then slowly but surely over the years it all changed. You know families didn’t go into residential, they’d be fostered out so obviously we’d start getting the ones that had got troubles you know...”²⁵

“...I know that the combination of sixteen young men [in the same home] was damaging to them. I think it was an awful concept, I really did because I think it was a very difficult time for young men generally, both educationally and emotionally and I just think that number you could not cater for with their added problems.”²⁶

“It’s just been a wonderful way of life.”²⁷

²¹ Interview with UH and NM, MS 2838/1/10/3.

²² Interview with JM, MS 2838/1/21/2.

²³ Interview with JG, MS 2838/1/15/3.

²⁴ Interview with CA, MS 2838/1/3/3.

²⁵ Interview with VA, MS 2838/1/11/3.

²⁶ Interview with JG, MS 2838/1/15/3.

²⁷ Interview with JP, MS 2838/1/2/3.

Photographs and other items

As part of the project, members of the public were invited to deposit items relating to children's homes, and most of the items received were photographs. Some people deposited original photos, while others chose to deposit copies. These items are catalogued as part of MS 2838.

The project collected photographs of the exteriors of many of the children's home buildings which are still in existence in 2010, and these are accessible to all researchers. The project also received some photographs of homes which have since been demolished, including several of the buildings at Shenley Fields Cottage Homes, and a photo of the demolition of Middlemore House.

Many other photographs collected through the Children's Homes Project are snapshots taken by houseparents, capturing images of events such as holidays and Christmases, as well as casual photos taken in and around the home. Unfortunately, there are few photographs which give a clear representation of the interior of the homes. Homes for which photographs were donated include Erdington Cottage Homes, Shenley Fields Cottage Homes, Fountain Road, Reynoldstown Road, Kings Nursery, Garth Residential Nursery, and Bridgeburn Road.

It was important to collect and preserve photographs because few photos exist within the official records of the children's homes, and because many former looked-after children do not have photos from their childhood. Children were not usually given photos of themselves, and even if they were, many children spent time in several homes, increasing the chance of belongings being lost in a move.

Photographs of children usually have restricted access for 100 years from the date they were taken. If a photo is closed to researchers this will be stated in the catalogue, along with the date on which it will become available to view. In certain circumstances permission may be granted to access closed material; if you would like to apply to view restricted items, please ask a member of BA&H staff for advice.

Records held at Birmingham Archives and Heritage

This part of the source guide describes the background to state-provided childcare in Birmingham, and explains which records survive and how they are catalogued. Please see each collection's catalogue for further details.

Please note that under the Data Protection Act 1998 the majority of records relating to children will be closed for a period of 100 years from the date of their creation (in the case of registers or other books, 100 years from the date of the last entry). If you would like to enquire about information held in a closed record, please see the Contacts page for details of who to contact.

The history of children's homes in Birmingham

The period before 1912

The responsibility for poor or destitute children rested on the parish under the Old Poor Law of 1601. By the beginning of the 19th century it was possible that they could be accommodated in workhouses alongside adult paupers, although "outdoor relief" (that is, support given to the poor outside the workhouse) was still common.

Following the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act (the New Poor Law), the poor became the responsibility of local Poor Law Unions, governed by Boards of Guardians. Birmingham was covered by three Boards of Guardians: Birmingham, in the central area; Aston, in the north of the city; and Kings Norton, in the south. The New Poor Law vastly reduced the opportunities for outdoor relief, and was the impetus behind the building of the notorious Victorian workhouses, which often had very harsh conditions. The Birmingham Union built a new workhouse in 1852, Aston Union opened its new workhouse in 1869, and Kings Norton Union followed suit in 1870.

Children who were destitute were accommodated in workhouses alongside adults, but from the mid-19th century it began to become apparent that this system, particularly in the industrial cities of England, was a poor way to care for children. Boards of Guardians attempted to separate workhouse inmates, with men's, women's and children's accommodation, but it was not an easy system to maintain. It was felt by many in power that children should be kept apart from the "corrupting" influence of adult paupers, and in the latter half of the nineteenth century various attempts were made to change the care of destitute children. The period from the 1860s to the 1880s saw the establishment of charitable organisations such as Barnardo's, the Waifs and Strays Society (later the Children's Society) and the National Children's Home (later Action for Children), all of which placed destitute children in orphanages. In Birmingham, Josiah Mason opened his first orphanage in Erdington in 1858; the Children's Emigration Homes were opened by John Middlemore in 1872; and the Princess Alice Orphanage at Oscott was opened in 1884.

The Birmingham Union had experimented, unsuccessfully, with a boarding out (fostering) programme for workhouse children, and in the 1870s it was decided to provide entirely new and separate accommodation for children. To this end, in 1878 a piece of land was purchased at Marston Green, in a rural area outside the industrial heart of the city, and a system of cottage homes was built. When the homes opened in 1879 there were 14 cottages, each with space for 30 children. Marston Green was an early example of cottage homes in England, and over the next thirty years they became popular in many parts of the country.

The Kings Norton Board of Guardians opened its own cottage homes at Shenley Fields in 1887. The first report of the Shenley Fields Cottage Homes Committee reported that the homes had been built “for the purpose of furthering the desire to separate the children whose unfortunate circumstances placed them under [the Board of Guardians'] care, from contact with the adult paupers in the Workhouse and the influences attaching thereto, and of placing them under conditions much more favourable to the development of their physical and mental powers.” Initially the site consisted of four homes, with 80 children being transferred from the workhouse, but it quickly became apparent that more accommodation was needed, and the site was expanded.

The Aston Guardians were somewhat slower to provide their own separate accommodation for children, instead relying on a boarding out programme and placing children into Wolverhampton Union’s Wednesfield Homes. By the 1890s, however, they were looking to build their own cottage homes, and in 1899 Erdington Cottage Homes opened. 16 cottages were built, although initially only eight were used, with the others being brought into use as demand increased.

Cottage homes became their own community, and had facilities such as chapels, schools, playing fields and swimming baths. Children in the homes were isolated from the outside world, and the boys were trained in trades such as shoemaking and carpentry, while the girls learned domestic skills.

The Children Act 1908 changed the way children were treated by the courts, with measures including the introduction of juvenile courts and the abolition of the death penalty for children under 16. It also required that children brought before the courts should have a remand home where they could be sent while awaiting trial or transfer to an industrial school. Barrow Cadbury, therefore, founded the independent Birmingham Children’s Remand Home at 232 Moseley Road (later Athelstan House); opened in 1911, it worked very closely with the City Council’s Watch Committee, and provided accommodation both for children who were in the criminal justice system and those who required a place of safety to protect them from destitution or neglect. The former group were usually transferred to an industrial school or reformatory, while the latter groups would be released to their parents or transferred to one of the children’s homes.

1912-1930

In 1912 the three Boards of Guardians of Aston, Birmingham and Kings Norton were amalgamated to form one union, the Birmingham Poor Law Union. The new, larger union now had control of all three of the city's cottage homes.

The cottage homes were the main children's homes run by the Boards of Guardians, but there were other, smaller homes as well: Summer Hill Receiving Homes opened in 1910, to accommodate children on a short-term basis before they were returned to their family or moved to a cottage home; service girls' homes opened on Moseley Road and Beaufort Road in 1912 and 1914 respectively, and provided accommodation for girls who were working in service; and a working boys' hostel was opened on Vauxhall Road in 1913, providing accommodation for boys who were working. Later, in 1921, Riversdale, a hostel for working girls, was opened on Bristol Road; by this time, the two service girls' homes had closed.

1930-1948

The 1929 Local Government Act abolished all Poor Law Unions and Boards of Guardians, and their functions were transferred to local authorities from 1930. Responsibility for the children's homes passed to the Education Committee of Birmingham City Council (with the exception of Summer Hill Homes, which were the responsibility of the Public Assistance Committee from 1930 to 1935, when they were finally passed to the Education Committee).

The Children and Young Persons Act 1933 compelled local authorities to provide a remand home for children, and the Education Committee of the City Council therefore took over responsibility for the running of the Birmingham Children's Remand Home on Moseley Road.

In 1933, Marston Green Cottage Homes closed. There had been a fall in the numbers of children accommodated there, due to an increase in boarding out and the space available at Shenley Fields and Erdington Cottage Homes; this, combined with Marston Green's isolated position and the age of the buildings, meant that it was no longer economical to maintain it. After the homes closed, the buildings became part of Coleshill Mental Hospital.

In 1939 Summer Hill Receiving Homes closed, and the building was transferred to the Public Assistance Committee for use as an old people's home.

Elsewhere in the city, new homes were opening. Several residential nurseries, for very young children, were opened between 1928 and 1942. Remand homes for senior girls (The Limes) and senior boys (Forhill House) were opened in 1945 and 1948 respectively, with the remand function for junior boys remaining at Moseley Road.

1948-1970

The Children Act 1948 compelled local authorities to set up Children's Departments, headed by a Children's Officer, and the responsibility for the running of children's homes passed to the new department. From this time onwards, large-scale residential care began to fall out of fashion, and smaller children's homes became more favoured. These homes, known as family group homes, were often built on new estates of council houses, and looked similar to their neighbours. They usually accommodated between 6 and 12 children, who would be looked after by houseparents, usually a married couple. Many of these homes attempted to replicate a family atmosphere, and often the houseparents would be called "Mum and Dad" or "Aunt and Uncle".

In this period, Birmingham City Council opened over 50 children's homes, many of which were family group homes. Several were homes for working children (i.e. children who had left school and begun to work, but who were not yet ready to live independently), and others were reception centres.

1970-2010

The Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 amalgamated welfare services for adults and children into a single department, abolishing the existing Children's Departments. Birmingham City Council's new Social Services Department came into being in July 1970, and took over the responsibility for the residential care of children. New types of homes appeared, such as observation and assessment centres and community homes with education, to cater for children with different needs.

Birmingham City Council opened several more children's homes during the 1970s, and the number of council-run homes in the city peaked at around 130 in 1975. After this, however, numbers began to fall quickly. Reviews of childcare in the city recommended that fewer children be taken into care, and that fostering was a better way to look after many children. From the late 1970s homes began to be closed, a process which gained momentum in the early 1980s, and by 1989 fewer than 40 homes remained.

Erdington Cottage Homes (latterly known as The Gardens) and Shenley Fields Cottage Homes (sometimes known as The Drive) were part of this wave of closures in the 1980s. Accommodating large numbers of children together in this way had come to be seen as outdated, and it was thought that children who needed residential care would be better served by being closer to the community as a whole. Although the cottage homes had become much more closely integrated with the wider community than in their early days, they were slowly closed down over the course of the 1980s.

Other changes were seen in the 1980s and into the 1990s. The system of having houseparents who lived on site was gradually dismantled, and houseparents were replaced by non-resident officers in charge and care workers. The programme of home closures continued throughout the 1990s, although it had slowed. The profile of children in residential care was also changing. With the increase in fostering and the decrease in

the numbers of children being taken into care, those children who needed to live in a children's home were by now often presenting more challenging behaviour. The old ways of caring for children in children's homes would not be suitable for those with more severe problems.

The Children Act 2004 required local authorities to combine their services for children, leading to the separation of children's and adults' social services. In Birmingham, the City Council established the Children, Young People and Families directorate, which took over responsibility for children's residential care.

The number of homes in the city continued to fall, and by the end of 2010 there were around 20 children's homes run by Birmingham City Council.

Records of children's homes run by Birmingham City Council

The survival of records from children's homes has been patchy. Homes would keep records such as registers of residents' admissions and discharges, log books, and staff registers. Some, but not all, of these have survived for some homes, and the majority of homes appear to have no surviving records at all. Those which are held at BA&H are listed here. Dates given below refer to the dates for which records exist, not necessarily the dates between which the home was open.

BCC 10/BCH/1

Marston Green Cottage Homes, 1880-1933

Registers of children; admission and discharge books; register of children sent to service; register of baptisms; punishment book; ophthalmic register; and records of Marston Green Cottage Homes School.

"Marston Green Cottage Homes Reports 21-32, 1900/01-1911/12" are in the Local Studies collection at L41.31.

BCC 10/BCH/2

Shenley Fields Cottage Homes, 1887-1952

Registers of children; admission and discharge book; register of deaths; medical relief book; report books; superintendent's journals; resolutions of the Committee.

"Reports of the Cottage Homes Committee, 1890-1906" are in the Local Studies collection, ref. L90.4.

BCC 10/BCH/3

Erdington Cottage Homes, 1899-1973

Registers of children; registers of baptisms; register of deaths; confirmation register; service register; chaplain's report books; photographs; records of Erdington Cottage Homes School; register of staff.

BCC 10/BCH/4

Summer Hill Receiving Homes, 1921-1937

Admission and discharge book; Summer Hill Receiving Homes School admissions register.

BCC 10/BCH/5

Riversdale Girls' Hostel, 1938-1952

Registers of children; matron's journals.

BCC 10/BCH/6

Lordswood Nursery, 1928-1952

Registers of religious creed.

BCC 10/BCH/7

Middlemore House, 1950-1952

Register of admissions and discharges; admission register.

NB: at this date, Middlemore House was leased by Birmingham City Council, and was no longer in use by the Middlemore Emigration Homes.

BCC 10/BCH/8

8 Shelfield Road, 1952-1977

Record of fire drills.

BCC 10/BCH/9

Hawthorn House Residential Nursery, 1960s

Photographs.

BCC 10/BCH/10

Forhill House Remand Home and Observation and Assessment Centre, 1945-1987

Admission and discharge registers; daily registers; log books; punishment books; visitors' books.

BCC 10/BCH/12

Athelstan House (formerly Birmingham Children's Remand Home and Moseley Road Remand Home), 1909-2000

Registers, day books, and night books.

Reformatories, industrial schools and approved schools

Birmingham Archives and Heritage holds the records of three former approved schools: Shawbury School (formerly Shustoke Industrial School); Tennial School (formerly Gem Street Industrial School, Harborne Industrial School and Ansell Industrial School); and Norton School (formerly Saltley Reformatory).

Shawbury School was under the control of Birmingham City Council from its foundation, and was first run by the Industrial School Committee, before being transferred to the Education Committee in 1903, the Children's Committee in 1948, and finally the Social Services Committee in 1970. Tennial School and Norton School were both independent until the early 1970s, when under the Children and Young Persons Act 1969 they were brought under local authority control. In the case of Tennial this was Birmingham City Council's Social Services department, and in the case of Norton this was Warwickshire County Council. The schools were therefore administered in the same way as children's homes, rather than mainstream schools.

All three schools closed in the early 1980s.

Records of these schools held at BA&H are more comprehensive than those of most of the children's homes.

The history of reformatories, industrial schools and approved schools

Until the mid-19th century, juvenile criminals were treated in the same way as adults and subjected to the same punishments, including prison sentences, transportation and capital punishment. By the 1840s a small but growing number of reformers held the belief that this was inappropriate, and that children should be treated differently: instead of being dealt with as small adults, their age should be taken into account, and they should be viewed as less responsible for their crimes. This new kind of thinking led to the establishment of several reformatories and industrial schools in Britain by the mid-1850s.

The first reformatory school in England was opened at Redhill, Surrey, in 1849, and until 1854 the few reformatories in existence were run by voluntary societies. The Youthful Offenders Act 1854 introduced state involvement, offering official certification and empowering the courts to sentence children to the institutions. At about the same time, Saltley Reformatory was opened in Saltley, near Birmingham, in premises provided by Charles Adderley (later Lord Norton), the main supporter of the Act in Parliament.

Children found guilty of a punishable offence could be sentenced to up to five years' reformatory training, to be preceded by a prison sentence of at least fourteen days (although the requirement for a prison sentence was reduced to ten days in 1866, made optional in 1893, and abolished altogether in 1899). Before the act was passed there had been seven reformatories in existence in England; by 1859 there were 59. Children were educated and trained in various trades, including gardening, farming, tailoring, and shoemaking. In some schools, such as Gem Street Industrial School, children were sent out to work in local factories; some of their wages would be saved for them, but most of

the money they earned went to the school. This practice appears to have ceased by the 1890s.

Industrial schools along similar, although less severe, lines to reformatories began to appear in England in about 1854, although the term seems to have been in use earlier as a variant of the “ragged schools”. The original intent of the industrial schools was to receive children who were destitute or vagrants, to remove them from “undesirable” influences, educate them, and teach them a trade. Schools were often built in rural areas, and outdoor work was favoured, as the fresh air and hard physical work was seen as particularly valuable, but children could also be taught shoemaking, carpentry, or other trades. Industrial schools, like reformatories, were initially run by voluntary groups, and official recognition came in 1857 when magistrates were given the power to sentence children aged between seven and 14 to an industrial school on a charge of vagrancy. This measure had limited success, as a charge of vagrancy was difficult to prove, but amendments to the law passed in 1861 expanded the numbers of children who could be committed to the schools. New groups included those keeping company with other offenders; children under the age of 12 who had committed an offence ordinarily punishable by prison (who were deemed, by virtue of their age, to be unsuitable for the harsher reformatories); and children whose parents claimed they were beyond control.

Birmingham’s first industrial school had opened in 1846 as St Philip’s Free Industrial School, becoming, in 1850, Gem Street Industrial School. It became a certified industrial school, run by a voluntary organisation, in 1868; in the same year, Birmingham City Council opened its own industrial school at Shustoke.

Broadly speaking, reformatories were intended to house children who had already committed crimes, while industrial schools were for those who were destitute or in danger of turning to crime; but by the end of the century, these functions had largely merged. Industrial schools tended to take younger children and those who had committed less serious offences, but both types of institution were used by the courts in a similar way. Both boys and girls could be committed to industrial schools and reformatories, but the majority of inmates were boys. It appears that there was provision for girls within Birmingham’s industrial schools and reformatories immediately following the 1854 Act, and Gem Street Industrial School had a girls’ department until 1873; but accommodation for girls had disappeared from Birmingham by the end of the 1870s, and from then on, girls would have been placed in schools in other parts of the country.

The Reformatory and Industrial Schools Act of 1891 empowered local managers of Industrial Schools to apprentice or dispose of well-behaved inmates in trade, service or by emigration, before the expiry of their period of detention. The Industrial Schools Amendment Act, 1894, stipulated that a boy sent to an Industrial School should remain under the supervision of the managers until he reached the age of eighteen years, giving the managers authorisation to recall the boy for three months if they deemed it necessary for his protection. From the late 1890s the practice of ‘licensing out’ was encouraged, with the prospect of a licence providing an incentive to good conduct, whilst keeping the child under probation.

The 1933 Children and Young Persons Act gave these institutions the new title of “approved school” – that is, approved by the Home Office. The new title distanced the institutions from their Victorian origins, although their functions remained similar. The act also increased the minimum age for admission to an approved school to 10. Under this act, children leaving approved schools remained on licence until three years after the date of their committal; for a further three years (or until they reached the age of 21, whichever was sooner) they remained under the supervision of the managers of the school. Children were still given an education and taught a trade, but the fashion for outdoor and farm work had largely passed, and urban schools were more popular with the authorities.

The three Birmingham institutions had by now all been renamed. Shustoke Industrial School had become Shawbury Approved School. Gem Street Industrial School had relocated from Gem Street to Balden Road, Harborne, in 1902, and in the process changed its name to Harborne Certified Industrial School, before changing once again, in 1925, to Ansell School. Its final name change, to Tennal School, came in 1933. Saltley Reformatory had become Norton Training School (sometimes known as Norton Boys’ Home) in 1908, and Norton Approved School in 1933. Norton School underwent a further change, when, in 1939, it was evacuated to Wales; following the end of the Second World War, the school did not return to its original premises in Saltley but moved to Little Kineton, Warwickshire.

Councils were now compelled to provide remand homes for children, and so a typical child might be held on remand after being sentenced to a term in an approved school, while awaiting a place in an appropriate establishment. Approved schools were not, however, penal institutions in the way that borstals were, being run more along the lines of boarding schools.

The Children and Young Persons Act 1969 abolished approved schools, reclassifying them as community homes with education (CHEs) and bringing them under local authority control. CHEs provided accommodation for children between the ages of 10 and 18, including those subject to care orders and those convicted of offences, and provided education on the premises. They were intended to utilise a child-centred approach to care. Throughout the 1970s numbers in CHEs declined, as other options for care and for dealing with young offenders found more favour. As policies within Birmingham’s social services department changed throughout the 1980s and 1990s, CHEs seem to have become just another part of the residential care structure. By 2010 there were no CHEs left in Birmingham.

Records of reformatories, industrial schools and approved schools held at BA&H

BCC 10/BCH/11

Shawbury School (formerly Shustoke Industrial School and Shawbury Approved School), 1868-1980

Administrative and financial records of the school; registers; admission and discharge books; discharge and aftercare registers; aftercare supervision officer's journals; punishment book; records of medical and dental treatment; records of old boys serving in the First World War; register of officers [staff]; wages books.

MS 244

Norton School (formerly Saltley Reformatory, Norton Training School and Norton Approved School, sometimes known as Norton Boys' Home), 1848-1982

Administrative and financial records of the school and its governing body; registers and admission books; disposal and discharge books; registers of boys on licence; incidental return registers; punishment book; printed materials, including annual reports and school magazines; miscellaneous items including several photographs.

MS 253 and MS 994

Tennal School (formerly Gem Street Industrial School, Harborne Industrial School and Ansell Industrial School), 1847-1984

Administrative, financial and legal records of the school and its governing body; admission registers; discharge and aftercare registers; approved school licensing registers; log books; camp records; medical records; staff wages books; printed material including annual reports; photographs; and miscellaneous items.

Further reading: *Young Offenders, Juvenile Delinquency, 1700-2000*, by Pamela Horn (Amberley, 2010); *The Approved School Experience: An account of boys' experiences of training under differing regimes of approved schools, with an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of that training*, Home Office Research Unit Report, by Anne B Dunlop (HMSO, 1974).

Other records

BA&H holds various other records which might be useful when researching children's homes. All of these records, including minute books, may have 100-year closure periods, because they often mention individual children. If this is the case, the closure period will be stated in the catalogue.

Boards of Guardians minutes

Before 1930, the Boards of Guardians were responsible for the care of destitute children. Minute books for the following committees give information on the running of their children's homes, their staffing, and in some cases details of individual children. Please see the full catalogue for further details.

Aston Union

GP/AS/2/3

Boarding Out Committee minutes, 1881-1912.

GP/AS/2/4

Cottage Homes Committee minutes, 1899-1912.

GP/AS/11

This series contains other material relating to children, including a register of adopted children, a register of children boarded out, a register of deserted children, and a register of servants and apprentices. Dates range between 1882 and 1913.

Kings Norton Union

GP/KN/2/6

Cottage Homes Committee minutes, 1885-1912.

Birmingham Union

GP/B/2/5

Boarding Out Committees minutes, 1879-1930.

The Birmingham Union appears to have had several different committees related to the boarding out of children, and the various minutes can be found in this series.

GP/B/2/6

Children's and Cottage Homes Committees minutes, 1871-1930.

The Birmingham Union had several sub-committees relating to the care of children. They included sub-committees for the Marston Green, Erdington and Shenley Fields Cottage Homes; the Summer Hill Homes; working girls' and boys' homes; and Lordswood Nursery. The minutes for these sub-committees can all be found in this series.

GP/B/11

Further records relating to children can be found in this series. They include apprenticeship indentures, papers concerning the emigration of pauper children, and minutes of the Conference on Relief (School Children) Order. Dates range between 1869 and 1911.

Council minutes

BCC 1/BH/5/5

Cottage Homes and Residential Schools Sub-Committee and Marston Green Homes, Erdington Homes and Shenley Homes Sectional Sub-Committees, 1930-1942.

These sub-committees were part of the Education Committee, which was responsible for children's residential care from 1930 to 1948.

BCC 1/CT/3

Homes Sub-Committee, 1948-1970.

BCC 1/CT/7

Approved School and Remand Homes Sub-Committee, 1949-1970.

BCC 1/CT/9

Residential Nurseries Sub-Committee, 1952-1966.

These sub-committees were part of the Children's Committee, which was responsible for the care of children between 1948 and 1970.

BCC 1/DJ/2

Approved School and Observation Assessment Centres Sub-Committee, 1971-1973.

BCC 1/DJ/4

Residential Services Sub-Committee, 1972-1975.

These sub-committees were part of the Social Services Committee, which was responsible for children in care between 1970 and 2004. Later minutes of the Social Services Committee are held in the Local Studies collection.

Other council records relating to children in care

Some departmental records relating to children in the care of the council have survived, including admission and discharge registers and boarding out registers. It is unclear how the different departments may have worked together, and why and by whom the records were created, and it is possible that information may be duplicated across items in different series. Please see the full catalogues for further details.

BCC 1/BH/D/1/1/2

Education Department records, 1916-1949.

Records kept by the Education Department, including registers of children in the care of the council and registers relating to homes run by other organisations.

BCC 1/CD/D/1/1/2

Public Assistance Department records, 1912-1949.

Records in this series were kept by the Revision Department of the Public Assistance Committee (and before 1930, by the Revision Department of the Board of Guardians). Examination books record financial contributions made to the upkeep of children in care, and some entries include brief descriptions of families' circumstances. Some Public Assistance Committee admission and discharge books have also survived.

BCC 1/CT/D/1/1/2

Children's Department records, 1900-1970.

Records in this series include: registers of children under the care of the Board of Guardians and Birmingham City Council; registers of approved school cases; children's records and registers; registers of admissions; and registers of children boarded out in Birmingham by other local authorities and voluntary organisations.

BCC 1/DJ/D/1/1/2

Social Services Department records, 1940-1984.

Records in this series include registers of children boarded out in Birmingham; registers of children boarded out outside Birmingham; registers of discharges; and discharge from boarding out registers.

Open-Air Schools

Open-air schools should not be confused with children's homes or orphanages. Open-air schools in Birmingham were Uffculme, Marsh Hill, Cropwood, Hunters Hill, Skilts, and Haseley Hall. The first to be established, Uffculme, opened in 1911; the last to close, Hunters Hill, did so in 1985.

The idea driving open-air schools was to treat children with conditions such as asthma, bronchitis, rickets, and malnutrition, who were growing up in inner-city areas which were detrimental to their health. Some schools, particularly in later years, also accepted children with other physical and learning disabilities or behavioural problems. The schools were set outside the city, to avoid the smoke, pollution and overcrowding of the central districts, and many had open-sided classrooms, which allowed the children to be taught in the fresh air. Others simply scheduled many outdoor activities. The children were given jumpers, blankets and hats when necessary, to ensure they did not feel cold, although the teachers were usually left to fend for themselves. Some of the schools were residential, while some took day pupils; all provided meals of a richness which was unusual among poor families until the latter half of the twentieth century.

In the early years of the open-air schools, children would usually attend temporarily, for several months or one academic year, although as time went on it appears that more children stayed for longer periods.

BA&H holds several collections relating to open-air schools, including BCC 1/BH/5/4, Minutes of the Open-Air School Sub-Committee; MS 2231, Records relating to Open-Air Schools; S 94, Records of Haseley Hall Open Air School; and S 128, Records of Marsh Hill Open-Air School, Erdington.

For further information, see *A Breath of Fresh Air: Birmingham's Open-Air Schools 1911-1970* by Frances Wilmot and Pauline Saul (Phillimore, 1998).

Children's homes run by other bodies

Birmingham Archives and Heritage holds records relating to three children's homes which were not run by the city council.

MS 517

Records deposited by the Sir John Middlemore Charitable Trust (formerly Middlemore Homes, formerly Children's Emigration Homes), 1869-2005.

This collection includes records relating to Crowley Orphanage for Poor Girls. Administrative and financial records, staff records, records of residents (including admission registers, application books, case files, aftercare cards, and adoption records), property records, printed material, photographs.

The Middlemore Homes were founded in 1872 by John Throgmorton Middlemore (1844-1924) as the Children's Emigration Homes; the homes were renamed Middlemore Homes in 1925. The aim of the homes was to emigrate children to Canada (and, from 1926, Australia) for what was perceived to be a better life, away from the poverty of industrial Birmingham. Child emigration by the Middlemore Homes ceased in 1949, and the focus of the charity shifted towards work in the area of family rehabilitation.

The Crowley Orphanage for Poor Girls was opened in 1871 in Icknield House in Birmingham, after a bequest by a local timber merchant, Thomas Crowley. In the 1890s the orphanage moved to new premises at 43-45 Lee Crescent. In 1940 the girls in the orphanage were transferred to other nearby institutions, after bombing raids near the building. The orphanage did not reopen after the war, and in 1948 its funds were transferred to the Middlemore Homes.

MS 1249

Princess Alice Orphanage (National Children's Home), 1879-1980.

Minute books, registers, photographs, log books, miscellaneous items. Please note there are no case papers held at BA&H.

Princess Alice Orphanage was opened in Sutton Coldfield in 1884, as the Midlands branch of the National Children's Home and Orphanage founded by Thomas Bowman Stephenson. The orphanage consisted of several smaller houses rather than one large building. Following the changes in residential childcare in the second half of the twentieth century, numbers of residents declined, and the orphanage finally closed in the 1980s.

MS 1609

Sir Josiah Mason's Orphanage and Almshouses, 1856-1990.

Administrative and financial records, correspondence, register index, legal records, plans, photographs, printed material.

Sir Josiah Mason (1795-1881) amassed a considerable fortune through his business interests, and because he had no family, he used his money for charitable purposes. He

founded a small orphanage and almshouses in Station Road, Erdington, which opened in 1858 to provide assistance for women over 50 and for orphan girls. Two years later he built a new, larger orphanage in Bell Lane (later Orphanage Road), Erdington. The orphanage continued to operate until 1960, by which time the building was uneconomical and unfashionable, and the state had taken over much of the provision of residential childcare.

After 1960, the bulk of the trust's resources were concentrated in the provision of residential care of the elderly. A small part of the trust's income is also set aside for educational grants for young people.

Further reading

This is a short selection of books and articles available in Birmingham Libraries which may be useful if you are researching children's homes. It is not an exhaustive list.

Birmingham Education Committee Reports for the years 1930-1948 can be found in the Local Studies collection.

City of Birmingham Public Assistance Committee Reports for years between 1931 and 1948 can be found in the Local Studies collection.

The First Four Years: the report of the Children's Officer of the city of Birmingham for the period from February, 1949 to January, 1953, and Report on the work of the Children's Department of the City of Birmingham, three years ended 31st March 1967, both contain sections on residential childcare and can be found in the Local Studies collection.

One Hundred Years of Child Care: The Story of Middlemore Homes 1872-1972.
A history of the Middlemore Emigration Homes.

On the Education of Pauper Children in Cottage Homes by F C Clayton (1888).
Written by a member of the Birmingham Board of Guardians, this short book contains information relating to Marston Green Cottage Homes.

Changing Child Care: the Children Act 1989 and the Management of Change by Gill Coffin (Birmingham Social Services Department, 1993).
Gives a Birmingham perspective on the Children Act 1989.

Protecting Children in Time by Harry Ferguson (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
Gives an analysis of the development of the idea of child protection over the last 120 years.

Child Welfare: Historical Dimensions, Contemporary Debate by Harry Hendrick (Policy Press, 2003).

A historical perspective on the development of child welfare policy in the 20th century, and a discussion of contemporary policies.

New Lives for Old. The Story of Britain's Child Migrants by Roger Kershaw and Janet Sacks (The National Archives, 2008).

Tells the story of child migration and explores the beliefs of those behind the practice.

Bare Bottoms and Stinging Nettles by Susan K Moore (Fillongley, 2005).
Oral histories and memories of schools in the old Forest of Arden, North Warwickshire, including Shawbury School.

The Children's Homes Village by Jill Plumley (Brewin Books, 1992).
Reminiscences of former residents and staff of Shenley Fields Cottage Homes.

Directory of Birmingham City Council Children's Homes

<http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk/childrenshomes.asp> or available as a hard copy in BA&H.

This website was created by the Birmingham Children's Homes Project as a directory of all the children's homes which were run by Birmingham City Council. Information was found in council minutes and recollections of former residents and staff. The directory was designed not only to be useful for researchers and those with a general interest in the history of Birmingham, but also as a resource for former residents of residential care, who are able to access a short history of their former home in a way which has been impossible until now.

Contacts

For further information on any of the records in this guide, please contact BA&H:

Tel: 0121 2424 242

Email: archives.heritage@birmingham.gov.uk

Many of our catalogues are now available on the website:

<http://www.libraryofbirmingham.com/archives>

<http://calmview.birmingham.gov.uk>

Access to closed records

If you are searching for information about yourself or a relative which you think may appear in records held at BA&H but which are closed under the Data Protection Act, you can apply to see the information. Closed records are not generally available to view in our public searchroom, but we have procedures in place to allow access to the records in certain circumstances. Please contact BA&H for full details on how to request access.

Access to case files

BA&H does not hold case files. They are kept by the Children, Young People and Families Directorate.

Many case files for children in the care of the council before the 1980s were routinely destroyed, and so, unfortunately, many people are disappointed in their search for records. If you wish to try and access your case file you must apply in writing, providing proof of your identity, and giving as much detail as possible about services you have had contact with (such as dates, places, and names of staff members) to enable any surviving records to be found. Alternatively, you can complete a Subject Access Request form, which can be obtained from the same team. Even if you complete a form proof of identity and details of service contact will still be required. Please contact:

Data Protection and Freedom of Information Team
Children, Young People and Families Directorate
Birmingham City Council
Martineau Centre
Balden Road
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