

The origins of residential child care services in Scotland

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Abstract

This paper describes the origins of residential care services for children and young people in Scotland. It focuses on the early history of orphanages, children's homes, industrial schools, and reformatory schools. Starting with the establishment of Heriot's Hospital for orphan children in Edinburgh in 1659, a small number of orphanages opened across the country. However, it was not until the second half of the 19th century that there was a more rapid expansion of orphanages and children's homes. In the 19th century, there were also developments to remove children and young people from prisons. Industrial schools and reformatory schools were set up to accommodate young offenders or those on the edges of crime. Care for children in these institutions was unbending, employing rigid rules and regulations. The main features of discipline were described as conformity, respect for authority through intimidation, and the widespread use of corporal punishment, as well as moral rectitude through religious teaching. While there are continuing tensions and issues in the provision of residential care, there have been clear improvements in quality and standards. The rights of children and young people are now central, and, for some children and young people, residential care can offer a positive, caring and loving environment.

Keywords

Orphanages, children's homes, reformatory schools, industrial schools, history, group care, Scotland

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Introduction

When I was asked to undertake a review of the development of care services in Scotland from 1900 to the present day for the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, it soon became apparent that the origin of many residential services for children took place before 1900, and as such it felt important to discuss their early history (Kendrick et al., 2021). While the 18th and 19th centuries saw Scotland's distinctive approach to the boarding out of children under the Poor Law, they also saw the development of a range of residential services for children and young people.

There has been a long history of providing relief for the poor, sick and vulnerable in institutions in Scotland, going back to medieval times (Hall, 2006). These institutions had a variety of functions and a range of names: hospital, spittal, Maison Dieu, infirmary, almshouse, and bede-house (McCallum, 2014). While there is little information about children in these institutions, Cage refers to the Trinity Hospital in Edinburgh, established about 1460, for 'the sick, pilgrims, orphaned children, aged and infirm poor' (Cage, 1974, p. 176). Durkan also mentions the 'blew freris', poor children maintained in St George's Hospital in Dunkeld in the 16th century (Durkan, 1959, p. 275). Most children and young people at that time were placed alongside adults in hospitals, poorhouses, and prisons.

Triseliotis (1988) noted that the development of residential institutions for children in Scotland lagged behind their development in England, with White (1973) suggesting that there was an aversion to institutions in Scotland. While some orphanages were established in the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries, it was not until the latter half of the 19th century that there was a rapid expansion of residential institutions for children and young people.

Building upon early examples, a range of residential services for children was established over the course of the 19th century. These included orphanages, industrial and reformatory schools, rescue homes, refuge homes and Magdalene asylums, institutions for disabled children, hospitals, and convalescent homes.

In considering residential care in the past, it is also important to recognise that broader, societal attitudes to children and the understanding of children and

childhood have changed over time (Elsley, 2017). Children were expected to conform, respect authority, and obey religious teachings. Some practices, such as corporal punishment, were acceptable in the past, and could be used routinely to enforce discipline. However, this is not to condone past abuse and cruelty as simply something of its time.

In this paper, I will focus on the development of orphanages and children's homes, and industrial schools and reformatory schools, although, as we will see, the names and roles of different institutions could overlap. Some of the residential establishments for children and young people set up in the 19th century still exist today, having transformed over the years in line with legislation and improvements in quality and standards.

Orphanages and children's homes

Orphanages had a long history in Europe, with institutions being established in different countries from the 16th century (Jacobi, 2009). In Scotland, while there were some early institutions for orphan children in the 17th and 18th centuries, it was not until the second half of the 19th century that there was a more rapid expansion of orphanages and other establishments, setting the foundations of residential child care in Scotland.

Possibly the first residential institution specifically for children in Scotland was Heriot's Hospital in Edinburgh. George Heriot was born into an established family in Edinburgh. He was a goldsmith and jeweller to the royal family, hence his nickname 'Jinglin' Geordie (Lockhart, 2009). On his death, he left a legacy in his will 'to be employit for the mantinance relief bringing vp, and educatioune of puire fatherles bairnes friemen's sones of the Towne of Edinburgh' (Bedford, 1859, p. 262). The hospital was modelled on Christ's Hospital in London, and opened in April 1659, caring for 30 children, which rose to 43 in September of the same year (Lockhart, 2009, p. 60). The hospital continued to grow over the years, and in 1844 cared for some 180 children (Lockhart, 2009, p. 151). Heriot's Hospital in its turn became a model for other establishments in Scotland, such as the Merchant and Trades Maiden Hospitals and George Watson's Hospital in Edinburgh, and Robert Gordon's Hospital in Aberdeen.

In 1728, Andrew Gairdner, Treasurer of Trinity Hospital in Edinburgh, which he described as the Old People's Hospital, stressed the need for charity for orphans and poor children, and he made a proposal to erect an 'Orphan's Hospital' (Gairdner, 1728, p. 34). The Orphan Hospital opened in 1735, and by 1785, following the building of additional accommodation, was caring for 130 orphan children (Tod, 1785, p. 3). At the end of the 18th century, there were attempts to stop the encroachment of industrial activity around the hospital, but in 1828 the death of ten children, attributed to the unhealthy environment, led to the decision to move to a healthier spot, and in 1833, the Dean Orphan Hospital was opened.¹

Another early orphanage opened in Dundee in the early 19th century. The Dundee Orphan Institution was set up by public subscription and supported by doctors, mill owners, ministers, merchants, and estate owners. The tragedy of the Tay Ferry disaster, in which 17 lives were lost, gave impetus to the fundraising. A property was bought on Paradise Road, which in September 1815 opened for the care of nine boys and 12 girls (Glass, 2015, p. 7). Soon this building was deemed too small and, in 1818, a larger property in Small's Wynd was purchased, continuing as the orphanage until 1870, through financial crises and the granting of a Royal Charter (Glass, 2015, p. 14). Small's Wynd itself became too small, and the Dundee Royal Orphan Institution moved to the specially built Carolina House on Broughty Ferry Road, providing a home and school for 55 children (Glass, 2015, p. 23).

The second half of the 19th century saw a major upheaval in the provision of hospitals and orphanages. The 27 endowed hospitals across Scotland, ranging in size and revenue, came under increasing scrutiny. The wealth of some of the hospitals, based on the investments of the governors, became a matter of public concern. Concerns about the quality of education in the Hospitals were also raised (Checkland, 2000, p. 68). Following several Acts of Parliament, the welfare and educational elements in the hospitals were separated (Highet, 1969; Kerr, 1962). Because of this, the endowed hospitals were taken forward in a number of different ways. Several became day schools or boarding schools.

¹ This is now Modern Two, one of the buildings of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.

Others, such as the Dundee Royal Orphan Institution and the Edinburgh Orphan Hospital, continued as orphanages, and Donaldson's School continued as an establishment for deaf children.

This period also saw the founding of a number of new orphanages and children's homes. White (1973) argues that there were three main reasons for this. Under the Poor Law, children only received support from the parish up until the age of 14, and at this point many were forced onto the street. 'Quarrier's Homes (1871), Ponton House (1865) and some of the Church of Scotland Homes (c.1904) were originally set up for this purpose' (White, 1973, p. 6). Linked to this, there was an increase in philanthropic concerns about the plight of vulnerable children, exacerbated by the economic slumps of the 1880s and 1890s, which led to 'more children on the streets' (White, 1973, p. 71).

Initially, children could only be boarded out or placed in institutions with the consent of their parents. Increasingly, however, children were separated from their parents against their parents' wishes (Hill et al., 1991, p. 191). There was a progressively more interventionist approach, driven by various societies set up to prevent child cruelty. Children were removed from parents who were deemed unfit, either due to physical or mental ill health, or because of 'intemperate or profligate habits' (Skelton 1876, pp. 76-77). By the end of the 19th century, over a third of children were separated from their parents for such reasons (Levitt, 1983, p. 369).

Some of the new orphanages developed into extremely large institutions. William Quarrier began his work with street children in Glasgow in the 1860s and opened Renfrew Lane Home in 1871. Two more homes and a night refuge followed. In 1878, the Orphan Homes of Scotland opened with two cottages and a central building incorporating a school and a church. It grew to a village with some 40 cottages, a school, church, workshops and farms (Magnusson, 2006, p. 47). Aberlour Orphanage was established in 1875 when 'four mitherless bairns' were placed together in a cottage on the banks of the Lour (Divine, 2013, p. 12). It subsequently moved to a purpose-built orphanage: 'The Orphanage was entirely self-sufficient, self-contained, produced its own food. It was a world unto itself and carefully managed its contact with the wider society' (Divine, 2013, p. 13).

Other children's homes were smaller, and Abrams describes the Whinwell Children's Home in Stirling, founded by Annie Croall in 1883, as such: 'With beds for around 40 boys and girls, it was typical of the small town orphanage, well known in the community and almost totally reliant on donations for support' (Abrams, 1998, p. 81).

The third reason White gave for the expansion of orphanages at this time was the influx of Irish immigrants, especially after the famines of the 1840s and 1850s. Aspinwall described how the arrival of large numbers of poor, Irish migrants 'overwhelmed the small, insignificant ecclesiastical structures of the Catholic Church in the west of Scotland' (Aspinwall, 1982, p. 44). O'Hagan noted that, following an epidemic of cholera, a 'Catholic Orphan Institution' was opened in Glasgow in 1833 attached to St Mary's Church in Abercromby Street in the East End of Glasgow (O'Hagan, 2002, p. 111). 'Continued concern for the religious upbringing of children prompted the [St Vincent de Paul] Society to take a special interest in the work of Catholic Orphanages and reformatories' (McHugh, 1990, p. 233; see also, Aspinwall, 1986). The large Smyllum House orphanage was opened in 1864 as a successor to St Mary's, Abercromby Street. In the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, care for children in orphanages and children's homes was unbending and institutional, with rules and regulations rigidly enforced. This, however, was similar to all schools, where the main features of discipline were described as conformity, respect for authority through intimidation and the widespread use of corporal punishment, and moral rectitude through religious teaching (Munn, 2000, pp. 386-387). The older boys and girls in the Orphan Hospital in Edinburgh in the 1730s had little leisure time. The boys were spinning and weaving and the girls were knitting and garment making. Starting at 6 o'clock in the morning, they alternated their work with lessons, until 8.00 o'clock at night (Richardson, 1949, p. 160).

Day-to-day life in Quarrier's Orphan Homes involved the children in 'the cleaning, scrubbing, polishing, cooking and mending regime,' which started at 5am for older children (Magnusson, 2006, p. 47). Children were marched to breakfast, to school, to church, and to bed, and 'everything was done at a set time and in a set way' (Magnusson, 2006, p. 130). Punishment could be excessive and cruel. However, those who had lived there acknowledged

camaraderie, friendship and a family feeling among the children in the cottages. Magnusson considered that Quarriers Orphan Homes, at its best, cared for children 'lovingly and positively', and, at its worst, was 'guilty of inflexibility, regimentation and, sometimes, downright cruelty' (Magnusson, 2006, p. 117).

O'Brien reported on the similar accounts of three men who had been in the institutional care of the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul in the 1920s, one of whom was in Smyllum Orphanage. Routine, discipline, and religious practice were the hallmarks of institutional life. Punishment included the cane or strap, as well as deprivations such as going to bed without supper, or other humiliations. 'Expressions of tenderness were not part of the Sisters' regular care practice, but this did not mean they were entirely absent either' (O'Brien, 2017, p. 186).

Contemporary reports, however, tended to be more positive. Tod described the introduction of a number of trades into the Edinburgh Orphan Hospital in the 1780s (for example, shoe making, tailoring, bookbinding, and hat making):

After the hours of their education in reading, writing, arithmetic and religion, they are all pleasantly employed in useful work, suited to their ages; which by gentle activity gives strength and vigour to their little bodies, and by early exertions, brightens the rising genius of their young minds (Tod, 1785, p. 4).

In 1910, for his work for the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, Parsons visited Smyllum Orphanage and admired the beautiful grounds and the large and well-kept dormitories and playrooms: 'The children are most carefully trained and sympathetically looked after by the Sisters... Both boys and girls are well and warmly clothed' (Parsons, 1910, p. 99).

Reformatories and industrial schools

Alongside orphanages and children's homes, another important and overlapping sector of residential care in the 19th century was that of the reformatories and industrial schools. Prisons in England and Scotland were notorious for their squalid conditions, corrupt administration, and poor quality staff (Coyle, 1991; Dobash, 1983). In the 19th century, however, many children and young people

were housed in prisons (Ralston, 2017). Conditions for them were repressive and harsh, and young people frequently became mentally ill, often being driven to suicide. They could be kept in solitary confinement or prevented from speaking to other prisoners, and were frequently punished, including being placed in irons or in dark punishment cells (Cameron, 1983, p. 103).

Over the course of the 19th century, a more reformatory approach to juvenile delinquency was adopted, as it started to be viewed as a social problem, with young offenders requiring training rather than punishment (Ralston, 1988). William Brebner, governor of Glasgow's Bridewell Prison, established a separate regime for juvenile offenders, and efforts were made to teach them a trade. Further, he proposed a separate institution, and in 1838 the Glasgow House of Refuge for Boys was opened (Coyle, 1991). A refuge for girls followed in 1840. However, Ralston (1988) notes that these institutions catered for both criminal and destitute children.

Parallel to these developments there were arguments that there should be a focus on children not yet involved in crime but on the edges of it. Industrial schools were considered a particularly Scottish response to this. Sheriff William Watson and Alexander Thomson of Banchory in Aberdeen, and Thomas Guthrie in Edinburgh, were highly influential in calling for proper education and industrial training (Ralston, 2017). The first industrial feeding school was opened in Aberdeen in 1841, with a school for girls following in 1843. These were quickly followed by day industrial schools in other towns and cities in Scotland. Although Sheriff Watson and Thomas Guthrie supported a non-residential principle, with children returning home at night, other industrial schools established dormitories for children, and this was accelerated by legislation in the 1860s.

Initially, there was no clear distinction between reformatory and industrial schools (Ralston, 2017). From the mid-1850s, the sector was increasingly regulated through legislation, which led to standardisation and the appointment of a national inspectorate, which, as far as it could, imposed a uniformity of approach. In 1866, the Reformatory Schools Act 1866 and the Industrial Schools Act 1866 consolidated UK legislation (Kelly, 2016). This legislation, however, created a new blurring of the role of the two types of school. Children under twelve charged with a criminal offence could now be kept out of prison through

placement in an industrial school (Ralston, 1988, p. 51). Unlike the original, voluntary, day industrial schools, by the 1870s most children were placed by magistrates, and few returned home at night (Ralston, 2017, p. 154).

The number of industrial schools rose rapidly, and by 1883 there were 34 such schools in Scotland. Parker attributed this increase to the funding base for the schools, and the fact that children could be placed on a wide range of grounds, including delinquency, vagrancy, begging, being in the company of thieves, and moral danger (Parker, 2017, pp. 1-2; see also Urquhart, 2005). Indeed, the managers of some industrial schools employed agents to procure children from the streets to ensure a supply of new pupils (Kelly, 2019, p. 136). In addition, the precursors of the Royal Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (RSSPCC)² 'vigorously rescued neglected children who were reported to them or discovered wandering destitute on the street, making it their business to direct them promptly, via the burgh court, to institutional care in an industrial school' (Kelly, 2016, p. 73). Magdalene asylums, lock hospitals and refuges were also developed in an attempt to eradicate prostitution and the sexual exploitation of girls, and to treat those with sexually transmitted diseases (Thor, 2018, p. 349; see also Mahood, 1990). Such girls and young women tended to be considered prostitutes, and even if they were victims of child sexual assault they were still viewed as a sexual danger once their 'innocence had been violated', and 'were often sent to Magdalene institutions, rescue homes, industrial schools or children's homes' (Davidson, 2001, p. 72; see also Mahood, 1995).

In contrast to these wide-ranging issues, there were 'narrowly prescribed grounds' for placement in a reformatory school, not least that before placement in the reformatory the young person had to serve 14 days in prison (later reduced to 10 days) (Kelly, 2019, p. 111). Kelly argues that the 'Scottish distaste for child imprisonment felt by both the judiciary and "enlightened public opinion" resulted in the flourishing of industrial schools north of the border at the

² Following the establishment of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in London in 1884, branches were set up throughout Scotland. In 1889, the Glasgow and Edinburgh organisations joined to form the Scottish National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children. A Royal Charter was granted in 1921, to form the RSSPCC.

expense of reformatories' (Kelly, 2019, p. 130). In the 1880s there were 11 reformatory schools, only a third of the number of industrial schools (Parker, 2017, p. 11).

Among the Catholic community, the religious teachings of the industrial schools caused concern. Thomas Guthrie's refusal to allow Catholic religious instruction led to the establishment of the United Industrial School of Edinburgh, which admitted both Protestant and Catholic children and provided them with appropriate religious instruction (Mackie, 1988). Stack describes the depth of fear about the proselytisation of Catholic children and the political lobbying that took place to gain concessions in the reformatories and industrial schools legislation to ensure that Catholic children would be placed in Catholic institutions (Stack, 1997). Catholic reformatory and industrial schools were opened across Scotland (Aspinwall, 1982; McHugh, 1990). Aspinwall, however, identified the very poor conditions in the Catholic institutions, reflecting the poverty and social standing of the Catholic community. 'Saving children from perilous conditions and Protestant proselytism may have been laudable objectives but the infrastructure was inadequate' (Aspinwall, 2008, p. 90; see also Aspinwall, 1992).

Lloyd highlighted that despite the philanthropic basis of the founders of the reformatory and industrial schools, the regimes were harsh. There was a limited diet, an austere environment, a harsh routine of hard work, and severe discipline (Lloyd, 2000, p. 256). Urqhart gives an account of the Mars Industrial Training Ship in Dundee, which had a primary purpose of training naval recruits. The boys were expected to provide their own day-to-day care and were taught seamanship skills and trained in gun, rifle, and cutlass drill: 'The aim of the institutions was to produce hard-working, responsible and compliant adults, and it was argued that this could only be achieved through a tightly structured system of incarceration, industrial training, religious instruction, education and discipline' (Urqhart, 2005, p. 41).

Driven by changes in legislation, Ralston described how reformatory schools 'became increasingly penal institutions for hardened offenders,' so that by the 1870s they 'were subject to the criticisms made of prisons in the 1840s'

(Ralston, 2017, p. 163). Meanwhile, industrial schools were increasingly acting in a reformatory role for young offenders.

By the end of the 1800s, there were some 5,500 children and young people in 43 industrial schools and reformatories in Scotland (Kelly, 2016, p. 72). These developments led to a decrease in the number of juveniles in prison over the second half of the 19th century, from 1,062 in 1856, to 618 in 1896 (Barrett, 1900, p. 47). Ralston argues that the 'experiments with industrial and reformatory schools were arguably the most innovative philanthropic developments in mid-nineteenth century Scotland' (Ralston, 1988, p. 44).

Watson, writing in 1896, was a little less positive in his conclusion. He states that though they had not lived up to the claims of their 'early admirers' in terms of emptying prisons, and though 'they have not achieved such success as this, as little can they be reckoned failures' (Watson, 1896, p. 306).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have looked back at the origins of residential child care services in Scotland, some 350 years ago, and at developments through to the beginning of the 20th century. Many things have changed dramatically, while other issues echo through the years.

We no longer have the large, institutional hospitals, poorhouses, orphanages and schools of the 18th and 19th centuries. Gone, for the most part, are the rigid and harsh routines of residential care, where the individuality of children and young people was lost under unyielding rules, regulations, procedures, and schedules. Gone are the expectations that any person of supposed good character can care for vulnerable and troubled children and young people. Undoubtedly, some children and young people did benefit from their time in such residential institutions; many others experienced cruelty and serious abuse.

The intrinsic tension between care and control continues to confound residential work with children and young people, and to create barriers to their empowerment and their voices being heard. Legislation and policy, however, now recognises the rights of children and young people. Standards have embraced not only the physical environment and cleanliness, but also the quality

of care and support, involvement in decision-making, and confidence in the people and organisations who provide care and support. We recognise the central role of relationships in allowing children and young people to flourish in residential care, and the need for reflective and trauma-informed practice.

For all our advances over the centuries, we have still not managed to produce a society that provides a safe and secure environment for all children. So many children in Scotland continue to live in poverty, experience violence and abuse, and suffer from stigma and social exclusion. We still need to find effective ways to support them, and for some children and young people, residential care can offer a positive, caring and loving environment.

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