

THE HOME OFFICE CERTIFIED SCHOOLS IN NORFOLK, 1855-1933

by D. H. Thomas

The Home Office Certified Schools in Norfolk are interesting examples of institutions which existed until 1933. A Reformatory School for Boys was certified in 1855 at Buxton, and in 1894 it became an Industrial School, and ran until 1933 when it became an Approved School. An Industrial School for Girls at Fakenham was certified in November 1868 after having operated 'for some years' as a training school for girls going into domestic service; it closed in 1903. Although both Reformatory and Industrial Schools were founded by private efforts, and both received grants from the Home Office after certification, and both were inspected and reported on annually they served two different purposes, and the Reformatories are the better recorded of the two types.¹ In addition there was an example of a less numerous school at Great Yarmouth, a Day Industrial School, which ran from 1879 to 1898.

Reformatories were the first to be set up, being recognised as desirable by an Act of 1854 which aimed at decreasing the savagery meted out to juvenile offenders² whose punishment could include confinement in a prison hulk and deportation; even until 1893 those sent to reformatories had first to serve a period in prison for them to reflect upon their misdeeds.

Mr. John Wright (1794-1871) of Dudwick House, a Quaker and described by the Home Office Inspector as 'one of the earliest workers in the reformatory movement'³ had from 1850 assisted the re-settlement of young discharged prisoners by employing them on his several farms, and in 1852 he called a meeting of magistrates and other interested persons which resulted in the setting up in the same year of an establishment 'for the religious and industrial training of 40 offenders under the age of twenty' at Buxton, some nine miles from Norwich. 'Industrial training' was a feature common to both types of home office schools, conceived as a mode of inculcating habits of hard work and so preparing them for a useful life in the community; it served also to raise money for the upkeep of the institutions. Mr. Wright was helped in his endeavours by Sir Edward North Buxton M.P. (1812-1858), John Henry Gurney (1819-1890) and Mr. John Kett; the boys who were housed in the adapted farm buildings had been in jail at Norwich Castle. The Juvenile Offenders Act of 1847 enabled state support to be obtained, and after inspection by the local Inspector of Prisons the Buxton premises were certified on July 7th 1855 and until 1858 received money both from the Home Office and the Privy Council Committee for Education, and later only from the first named department.⁴ The early days at Buxton were somewhat turbulent, as there was no pool of experienced staff to call on, the first superintendents (whose names are not recorded) did not stay long, and indeed there was a 'mutiny' in 1855 which was quelled by a lay preacher who was staying with Mr. Wright, who himself was in overall charge. The visitor, Mr. Thomas Babington, was promptly appointed superintendent and his work for the school was praised by the Inspector after his death in 1898.⁵

For the first two years there were 36 youths housed, and when in 1858 the number reached 40 a branch was opened at Catton with Mr. Ellis in charge with 15 youths with an 'aptitude for shoemaking' who were training in this craft, as one which was 'a staple trade in Norwich.'

The first report by the newly appointed Home Office Inspector said that the Buxton School was 'in the first class of reformatories', and that the boys were chiefly employed in farming. The Catton branch closed in 1859 because the number of commitments of boys in Norfolk had decreased from 187 in 1856 to 116 in 1859, which was in line with the national reduction in juvenile crime due to the operation of the schools under the Acts mentioned.

An addition to the industrial training was in 1869 when Mr. Wright rigged two masts for naval exercise and amusement, and in the next year it was reported that several boys went to sea on leaving, but this rather naive activity ceased soon after Mr. Wright's death in 1870. In 1881 it was reported that 29 of the 41 boys who had left were 'doing well' and that the boys 'by their manner and bearing did credit to the training and influence of the school', and a modest industrial profit of £31 was made.

As additions were made to the premises the number housed grew to a maximum of 65, but from 1891 onwards there was a sharp drop, and in December the number was only 23, causing the managers to decide that it could not continue as a Reformatory, but after building improvements it opened as an industrial school in 1894, certified for 80 boys.

Industrial schools developed later than reformatories, the first resulted from an act of 1857, but Acts of 1860 and 1861 were much more effective in facilitating their development when they had become the responsibility, both administratively and financially of the Home Office.⁶ They arose from the realisation that prevention was better than cure, and their function was to house, clothe, educate to an elementary standard and provide industrial activities to those who were homeless, or in unsuitable homes, or in circumstances likely to lead to a life of crime. These schools were for potential not actual criminals, although later they took younger children who had committed a minor offence. They were run on more kindly lines than reformatories, housing a lower age group.

The forerunner of the first industrial school in Norfolk, one for girls, was the Fakenham Institution for the Training of Girls for Household Service, established in 1858 by Mrs. R. N. Hamond⁷ in which girls were housed and trained for 3/6d per week. This lady also founded a Nurses' Home nearby. In 1868 the training school was inspected by the Home Office and certified on Nov 17th of that year, but was in fact not called upon to house girls committed by magistrates (which gained a weekly grant of 5/- per child) until 1877 when it housed two such. The Inspector then remarked upon its long career as an orphanage and training of servants, and said it was well managed. Even by 1880 after the premises had been enlarged with 'no expense spared' there were only seven remanded out of a total of 68, and from then onwards there was an increasing proportion of girls on remand, with a decrease in the voluntary cases, but it continued to be 'carried on more as a home than an institution'.

The institution, which was in a fair-sized dwelling house with two wings, had a laundry a quarter of a mile away. The place was supervised by Mrs. Hamond, and later by her daughter Miss Sophie Hamond (1839-1907) as one of her many activities, with Mrs. Marshall as Superintendent and a staff.

A description of the school⁸ gives the time table. The girls arose in time for a roll call at six o'clock in summer, and half past six in winter, and went to their respective occupations before breakfast at eight o'clock. Practical activity, which included bread making and service in gentlemen's houses nearby occupied much of the day, with school lessons in the evenings. The education provided in this 'convenient and suitable school' was said by the Inspector to be good, but he insisted that those committed were taught on the premises, some of the voluntary cases attending a local Board school. Over the years a profit up to £64 a year resulted from the laundry and other activities and the arrangements for segregating the younger girls in one wing met with official approval. As an indication of the industrial training out of a total of 62, ten would do housework, two worked in the pantry, three in the kitchen, two in the scullery, two were nurses (presumably in the Nurses' Home), ten were in the laundry, three did dressmaking, and eighteen were in the workroom, whatever that was. On the whole health was good, there was a cottage at the sea, at Weybourne, for those needing extra care, but tuberculosis took toll of two girls in 1883 and again in 1885. The London School Board sent girls to Fakenham, particularly if they were 'needing kindness'.

At the end of the century all seemed well with the school, the religious education was deemed to be good by the diocesan inspector, and 'the girls behave very much as would those of a large well conducted family' in 1897, and there 'is an air of refinement about the girls' in the next report. There was regular inspection by a dentist by 1901. But in this same year there were ominous signs, the staff turnover became high and it was said that the school needed more supervision by the managers. In 1902 Miss Marshall resigned, the Inspector felt that she had stayed too long, and the place was in confusion, with training in abeyance, the tone not satisfactory, and six girls had absconded in one year. Miss Briggs, who had been there a year as schoolmistress took over as Superintendent, but the school ceased to satisfy the London School Board, and it closed in 1903, the girls being dispersed.

Dr. Barnardo's organisation took over the school, discharging a mortgage⁹ made by John Gurney and his heirs to Miss Hamond who died in 1907 after a period of ill-health.¹⁰

As said above, the Buxton Industrial School for boys opened in 1894 on the closure of the Reformatory in the same premises, and so continued its good work for under-privileged boys who were not criminals. It housed up to 88 boys, and the premises were improved from time to time, a new swimming bath and new industrial premises added in 1900 for example, so that it was described by the inspector as 'an admirable school' and 'one of the most efficient under inspection' in 1902. The school met more than local needs, a number of boys were sent from Birmingham in 1886 and up to 57 from the London County Council which sent an official to inspect their progress in addition to the Home Office visits.

Education on the whole was good, with good object lessons¹¹ and included lectures by visiting experts on farm work. Facilities in these schools were not conducive to educational experiment – but the Inspector noted with approval a novel activity in 1901 in which fair sized plots of land were allocated to boys who grew vegetables on business lines, achieving that most desirable aim in

education of integrating theoretical study with practical applications. Farming was the main activity, some 21% of boys adopting it as a career; the boys were welcomed at local farms, one, a good milker has his wage increased from £6.10.0 a year to £16.0.0 after one year.^{1 2} The superintendent kept in touch with old boys, and prevented exploitation of their labour. In 1911 some 20% left for the forces, and 12% took up domestic work in hotels, but the inspector noted 'the primitive state of the trades taught' in other directions, which few took up on leaving. But two prizes were won in 1908 at a local exhibition, due to the teaching of John Lusher who was cook/baker for 40 years. Boys swam in the Bure, and went to a summer camp at Runton and later Wroxham a few at a time. But in 1906 there was serious financial difficulty, as the 65 boys then detained were too few for viability, there was an overdraft of £400 and even the doctor's modest bill (for the lads were healthy) was an embarrassment. Changes in the committee took place, and donations enabled the school to continue, the number climbed to 91 by 1911 due in part to boys from London. During the first world war administrative burdens increased as Ministry of Agriculture regulations had to be applied; the school was not equipped with a typewriter until 1927 (and with electric light only in 1931), but the staff did include a clerk to help the superintendent, an unusual feature in industrial schools. The numbers dropped from 100 in 1918 to 60 in 1924, and to 38 in 1925, but thereafter increased to 70 due to closure of other schools. Like other Home Office Schools it became an Approved School in 1933 under the 1902 Childrens and Young Persons Act. Under the name of the Red House Farm School it continued to operate in the field of welfare but ceased to operate in the 1980s.^{1 3}

Day Industrial Schools of which there were never more than twenty in all, were started after the 1876 Education Act. They catered for the same type of disadvantaged child as the industrial schools described above but on a non-residential basis, they were open long hours, from 8.00 a.m. until 6.00 in the evening and provided three meals. According to one Home Office Inspector^{1 4} they arose from a suggestion of the pioneer Miss Mary Carpenter, but according to another official^{1 5} they had as their prototype the Ragged Schools of some thirty years before; he also expressed the view that 'no class of school has fluctuated as much as the Day Industrial School. In some towns it has been a success, in others as conspicuous a failure. They are eminently suitable for a class of children whose poverty leads to truancy and thence by too easy a stage to juvenile delinquency'^{1 6} That at Southtown Great Yarmouth was set up by the School Board in 1879 in an old farm building for up to 60 boys only. The industrial activity, said the inspector was 'notable for its application to the locality, being the making of cork fenders, rope splicing and knotting, carpentry, cooking applicable to service in smacks, and included signalling and the Morse Code.'^{1 7} Some gardening was done, so the boys were well fitted for a variety of posts when they left. However, the need for the school waned, and the last few years had an attendance of less than the certified number, and when only eight pupils were there in 1898 it closed at the end of the year; some of the inmates were transferred to the Buxton School.

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Appendix

The Superintendents at Buxton have been

Thomas Babington – 1855-1897

Thomas S. Babington – 1897-1898 (he went to Ashford Industrial School)

Alfred Babington – 1898-1927

Augustus Clement – 1927 to change of name.

Mr. Wright's heir Mr. John Sewell and his family gave long service to the management of the School.

¹Julius Carlebach: *Caring for Children in Trouble* (1970) Chapters 1 and 2

D. H. Thomas: The Chester Industrial School in *Jour. of Educational Administration and History* Vol. XIII No. 2 (July 1981) p.7.

²Margaret May: Innocence and Experience in *Victorian Studies* Vol. 17 No. 1 (1973) p.8.

W. B. Johnson: *The English Prison Hulks* (1970).

³*The Reports of the Inspector of Reformatory and Industrial Schools* No. 15 (for 1871) p.64. References to Inspectors Reports and remarks refer to these reports for the appropriate year in other parts of the article.

⁴Derick Mellor: *A History of the Red House School Buxton, Nr. Norwich* 1976. Printed for private circulation by Barnwell, Aylsham. (Local Studies section Norwich Library).

⁵*Report of the Inspector of Reformatory and Industrial Schools* No. 42 (for 1898).

⁶The more important Acts of Parliament include 20 & 21 Vict. c 48, 23 & 24 Vict. c 108, and especially 24 & 25 Vict. c 113 and c 132, and later consolidating and amending Acts.

⁷White's Directory of Norfolk 1864 and 1890.

⁸Reformatory and Refuge Journal No. 60 (November 1872) pp 132-4.

⁹Gurney of Bawdeswell Collection, RQC 64, 494-5 in Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

¹⁰Eastern Daily Press 13th April 1907.

¹¹Object lessons was a method of elementary teaching derived from J. H. Pestalozzi (1746-1827) and the Oswego movement in the USA, and was based on the use of an actual object to stimulate the mind of the student. The term is now archaic since demonstrations are commonplace, and was hardly novel when the Inspector remarked upon it.

¹²*Buxton Red House Report for 1908* (Norwich Library, Local Studies section). The reports for 1906 and 1911 are also informative.

¹³Derick Mellor, loc. cit, and the Aylsham and District Advertiser for Jan – Feb 1981 pp. 4 and 5.

¹⁴*The Reports of the Inspector of Reformatory and Industrial Schools* No. 18 (1874) p.7.

¹⁵Ibid No. 50 (1906) p.27. Ragged Schools are dealt with in C. J. Montague *Sixty Years of Waifdom* (1969 reprint of 1904).

¹⁶Ibid Report No. 44 (1900) p.36 of part ii.