

Cornwall and its role in the British Child Migration program



A presentation made to the Toronto Cornish Association by John Webb, October 2019.

These images are the two themes of this story.

- A CD cover of our favorite song, Cornwall My Home.
 - If we ever have a leader to tell us to “go back to where we came from”, most of this room would be on the first boat back
- And second, a Canadian stamp issued in 2010 to acknowledge the story of the British Home Children

First, a quick clarification. The children that were migrated to Canada became known as the British Home Children, whereas the overall program was known as the Child Migration program.

Next, can I ask how many are aware of the story of the British Home Children? Until recently, I was unaware, and, having checked around, it is not a well-known story. But I do know that we have members of our own association with family members who were home children.

If you Google “British Home Children”, this is what you will read:

Between 1869 and the late 1930s, more than 100,000 children were sent to Canada from Great Britain by philanthropic organizations like Dr. Barnardo’s.

Some were orphans, some were poor — many came from families who saw no other option. With overcrowding, disease and homelessness rampant in Industrial Revolution-era England, the idea was to send the children to the expansive land of Canada, where they could help on farms and have a chance at a good life.

Sounds fine, but it’s not a happy tale, in fact, Barnardo’s made this comment during the 2010 enquiry by the British government:

We accept that “the policy of child migration was misguided and wrong” but stated that “it was not seen as wrong at the time” and was done with good intentions and in accordance with government policies.

*Dicken’s, and all that ..
“England does not know what childhood is”*

Street Urchins



Child labour



Orphans in the Workhouse



The quote is from the book “The Labour Question in Britain”, published in 1896

Who were these children? They were street kids, working kids, and orphans. They were the result of massive movement into the cities, followed by a lack of housing as the railways were tearing up areas of the city. 30% of the population lived in poverty. Women and children had to work to provide the basic necessities. When one part failed, all suffered, and the final refuge was the workhouse.

Dickens told the stories, but *Oliver Twist* was based on the life of the 1840's when the workhouse children were sent out as apprentices. Things had changed by the 1860's. The policy was to make life in the workhouse worse than life outside. Adults were made to break rocks or to strip ropes to earn their keep. As a result, most inmates were children. 30% of residents in the workhouse were under 16, but at least they received some schooling.

Did you have an ancestor in the Workhouse? It is thought one in 10 people in the UK has a family connection to the workhouse. They include actors Felicity Kendal, Brian Cox, presenter Fern Briton, author Barbara Taylor Bradford and Kiera Chaplin.

My GGF was from 1860 – 1870, from the age of 5 – 15, in the Lambeth Union Workhouse. Charlie Chaplin was in the same workhouse and school around 1900

So, what was Britain's response to this social problem? The solution was The Child Migration Program

The British Child Migration Program

It lasted from 1868 to 1968,
with Canada the preferred destination until 1928.
Here, the children were known as the British Home Children.



Only in Britain. Of all the European countries, only Britain chose to export its pauper kids, rather than take care of them.

The scheme lasted 100 years, with the initial phase to Canada. As Google tells us, more than 100,000 children came to Canada, but after 1928, when the Canadian Government essentially forbade any further migration of unaccompanied children, the organizations moved to the other parts of the empire. 300 went to Rhodesia, 130,000 to Australia and 500 to NZ. There was earlier migration to South Africa.

I won't be discussing this later phase of the program, but just to note that the justification used for migration was more of an imperial purpose. After WW1, it was a case of rebuilding the anglo, white populations in the Empire. The total number involved is difficult to estimate because of the different ways of defining the children. In Australia they are known as Child Migrants or the Forgotten Australians.

Who ran the Child Migration Program and why?

Charity Organizations	Their Reasons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social Reformers<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annie MacPherson,• Maria Rye• Dr Barnardo• Churches<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wesleyan Methodists, Anglican, Catholic, Salvation Army, etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evangelical Revival<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moral Rescue• A healthier Life<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Back to the land• Safety valve against internal disorder

Charity Organizations, but they were supported by the British government and the parish authorities and the Canadian immigration departments. The records show at least 26 organizations were involved.

Independently, several people of different religious backgrounds had come to the same conclusion that the problem of pauper children could not be solved in Britain. These children had to be removed from the streets and given food and clothing. They had to be taught to read and write, given work skills and solid religious training, then sent abroad where farm labour was desperately needed. They believed that the children had no future in England, Ireland or Scotland.

Their reasons can be summarized in two ways, one based on the evangelical revival of the times, and the other on the view that Canada offered a new and bright future. There were the Social Reformers

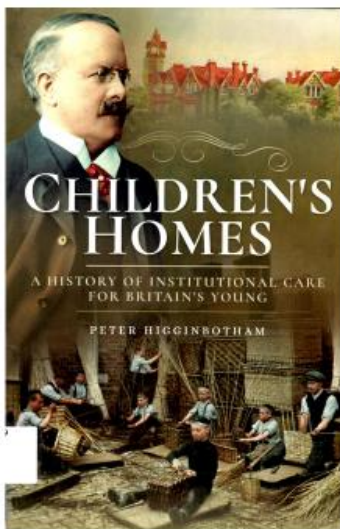
The first was Maria Susan Rye who had started by providing assistance for the emigration of women who found the constraints in England too harsh. The second was Annie MacPherson who had become concerned about the poor children of London's East End and, with her sisters, set up homes for these "waifs and strays. Both women

learned from the American experience after the Civil War when the New York Children's Aid Society sent orphan children in the eastern States to the farmlands of the central states.

Dr Barnardo was a late comer to the Program, but the most successful in terms of the number of children migrated. If you grew up in England, Barnardo Homes was the major charity, and the children were known as Barnardo Boys.. In fact, the Barnardo charity shops are still on every high street in England, although they no longer run Homes. We grew up with the fundraising. It was a scheme that was supported by Kings and Queens, and Diana, Princess of Wales, was the president for a time.

In a phrase in keeping with the evangelical revival of the 1850's, which was led by John Wesley, Barnardo was the "emancipator of the outcast child".

How did the Program Work? From the Children's Homes, to the migrant ships

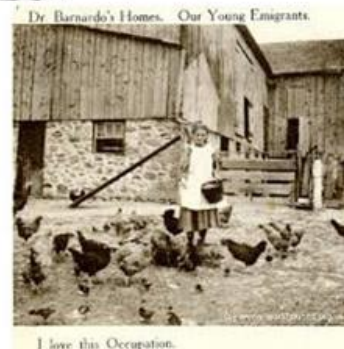
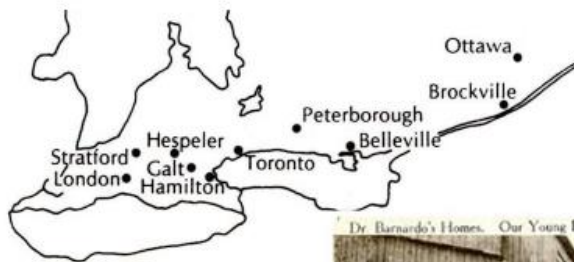


The Charities had a problem; desperate families and the Workhouses authorities had all applied to Barnardo's and other childrens Homes to take care of the children. But Children's Homes were full.

An open front door required an open back door, and in this case, it led to Canada. From these Children's Homes, the children were quickly grouped to be taken on a migrant ship. Often without the parent's approval or knowledge. They were too young to question. They were between 1 and 16 years old.

The numbers break down to 1,000 to 2,000 children per year to Canada, for 50 years. Roughly, 50% pauper, 30% illegitimate, 30% Orphans.

..... to the Receiving Homes in Canada,
..... and on to a new life



They arrived in Canada, either at Quebec City or Halifax. From there, the children were sent by train to the Receiving Homes in Toronto, Belleville, Galt, Peterborough, Stratford, Hamilton and NOTL. Other homes were in Quebec and Nova Scotia.

Here you can see the Receiving Homes in Toronto and Peterborough. A Heritage Toronto Plaque has just been installed on this Toronto home on Blue Jays Way.

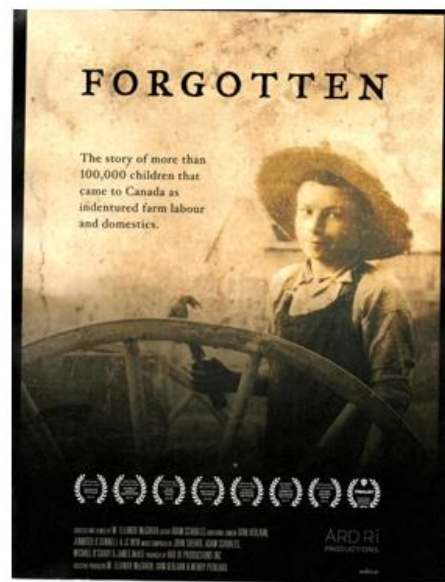
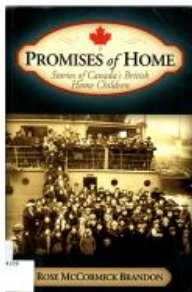
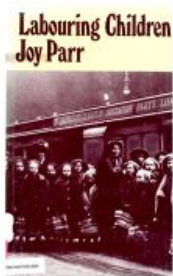
The Homes would place announcements in the local papers saying that a party of children would be arriving. From there, the children were

sent to farms or domestic positions, in response to applications from Canadian families.

Like all investigations, its always informative to “Follow the money”. Although the Charities were usually supported by rich Benefactors, together with fund raising drives, they received money from the processing of each child. Emigration cost the equivalent of one year’s maintenance in a workhouse or home. It was 12 pounds/year to support a child in a workhouse, until the age of 16. but a single payment of 15 pounds will send the child overseas,

And the Canadian Government paid a head tax, and farming families paid a fee as the children worked as indentured servants, until they came of age at 18.

The harsh reality - Some good, some bad and some ugly



What was life like for these children. Inquiries into the Program really only started in 1980, and since then, many books have been written.

- “Labouring Children” was published in 1980 but was more of a study of the economic benefits of working children.

- “New Lives for Old” was published in 2008 and is based on material from the National Archives in London and covers the overall Child Migration Program.

The other two books present a positive view:

- In the Introduction of “Promises of Home”, it is noted “A number of books have been written on how poorly the children were treated. But seldom have the good sides of their lives been written or talked about. There was a good side. Children did get to go to school, attend church, have friends and become part of the family.”
- In the introduction to the book on Home Children in the Clarington area, the author notes: “I found that all the children were treated well ... some families took in two of three and kept the family together.”

The documentary “Forgotten”, was produce a few years ago and shown on TVO. A very harrowing tale based on interviews with survivors. The authors estimated that 2/3 of the children were abused.

There is no generic story for the life of a Home Child. The children were used as indentured farm workers and domestic servants. The practice was to assign the children to farmers and never to see them again, trusting in the employer’s good will. There were some follow-up visits, but the size of the movement meant they were infrequent.

The reaction to the arrival of the Home Children in Canada was initially favourable as demand in Canada for farm labour seemed inexhaustible. Some were treated well, taken in as members of the family; many were seen as “little workers”; others were abused. The children were supposed to go to school, but this often depended on the farmer’s needs and harvest season.

There was a perception in Canada that the Home Children were “tough.” as they came from homes, from workhouses and from

reformatories; and others were gathered from the streets and put straight on the ship. The police blamed the rise in crime on the Home Children.

This resulted on the Stigma of a “Home Child”. This was a nickname hurled at the newcomers who spoke with strange accents and were rumoured to be young criminals taken from the streets of London. The Home Children were urban-dwellers, and initially had to be taught the business of working on a Canadian farm. They were perceived as slackers, lazy, and useless, the discarded of the mother country. They were often not physically strong, small for their age and some had disabilities.

The text of the very popular Canadian novel of 1908 “Anne of Green Gables”, includes the following comments on Home Children:

At first Matthew suggested getting a Home boy. But I said ‘no’ flat to that. ‘They may be all right—I’m not saying they’re not—but no London street Arabs for me,’ I said. ‘Give me a native born at least. There’ll be a risk, no matter who we get. But I’ll feel easier in my mind and sleep sounder at nights if we get a born Canadian.’

This shame caused many Home Children to remain silent about their backgrounds their entire lives.

CORNWALL

It was the time of the Great Emigration,
but poverty or the workhouse for the ones they left behind



The poverty and distress in Cornwall in the 1870's is well-known.

In the first six months of 1875, over 10,000 miners left Cornwall to find work overseas. But poverty and the workhouse were the fate of many impoverished, disabled, elderly or unemployed people in an era without welfare benefits or the NHS.

There were no Barnardo Homes in Cornwall, and just a few homes run by the Churches. Three “waifs and strays” homes, the Royal Cornwall Home for girls in Falmouth and the House of Mercy in Lostwithiel. So, the Workhouse was the only place left. There were 20 workhouses, and in a recent article in a Cornish Magazine, they were referred to as “Houses of Shame and Pain”

As part of my preparation for this story, I contacted the author of the book "The House on the Hill", describing the workhouse in Truro. I questioned whether there was any information on the migration of Cornish children.

Here was the answer:

"I did not come across any reference to children from the workhouse being sent to Canada. I was volunteering at the Record Office yesterday and asked one of the archivists if she knew anything about Cornish migration schemes and she thought there may be reference to children going to Australia

As a footnote to the suggestion of Cornish children sent to Australia after WW2, Cornwall Council made the following statement during the 2010 Government enquiry into the Program:

"This is a sad and highly emotive chapter in the country's history. The policy of trying to give children a better quality of life in one of the Commonwealth countries was one which was set nationally.

A search through the Records Office and the newspaper archives, provides additional information.

The workhouses were cooperating with the program. For instance, in the newspapers reports on the monthly meetings of the Local Government Boards which ran the Workhouses, there were many references to Fund raising activities and requests for children. And there are reports of children being migrated. Costs were often mentioned, either as a problem or a solution. Some examples:

- Falmouth Union 1896. 'Miss Freeman has received a very satisfactory letter about John Maunder lately sent by Dr Barnardo to Canada, he has been adopted by some good people and sent regularly to school. He is evidently very happy and contented.
- Redruth Union 1907. The Clerk referred to the lad John Hosking, whom the Guardians at the last meeting decided to assist to go out to Canada. The Board were called upon to contribute further sum of just over £3...etc etc. I traced his story, and he indeed migrated to Canada in 1907. His parents had died in 1900, and an older

brother William had migrated first in 1905. The census records of 1911 show them both as farmhands on a farm in Ontario.

- Penzance Union 1900. The Clerk called attention to the case of the lad Douglas Robertson, an orphan now in the workhouse, and who is proposed to send to Canada. The cost of the lad's emigration had turned out to be considerably more than was first anticipated... etc etc. Again, I traced his story and he was migrated in 1900.
- Helston Union 1907. The minutes note that the Salvation Army asked if they had any boys ready send to Canada. The Clerk said they had not, and the letter was allowed lie on the table.

On the trail of the Children

Sidney Tope

Early Life on Back Street, Kingsand
1889 - 1901



Jessie Nancarrow

Early life on Mitchell Hill, Truro
1869 - 1885



But before I tell the somewhat distressing and sad tale of their life, let me digress to how I was helped with my research.

Sidney Tope was born in Kingsand, which is in a secluded corner of South East Cornwall, just across the River Tamar from Plymouth. From the census reports I obtained his street address, which was Back Street, Kingsand. As this street did not exist on current maps, I contacted the local history group for assistance.

No problem, they said, and off they went to take pictures of the property and to explain why the street name had changed. It seems that Cornwall Council had a policy “to rename unfashionable street names and go upmarket”. The street is now named Heavitree Street, after the local brewery.

The other child was **Jessie Nancarrow**. In her early life she had lived in Truro, on a street now named Mitchell Hill. By chance, it is just off this street, that my Aunt has her house, so we had driven past on many occasions. Currently, a similar house was on the market for 195,000 pounds.

Sidney Tope

His life in Canada from 1901 to 1904

New Glasgow in Elgin County



Park Lawn Cemetery



He was born in Kingsand in 1888, one of four children. His family were navy pensioners, and both parents died by 1900. The children moved in with Aunt Lily in the adjoining house in Kingsand, but this was too much for Lily, who joined the Prison Service.

Somehow, and very quickly, Sidney was on the migrant boat from Liverpool to Quebec, and from there to the Barnardo's Home in Toronto. He was then transferred to the farm of John McNicol, of New

Glasgow, in Elgin County on Lake Erie, This was part of the Talbot Settlement, and full of Scottish immigrants.

Here, he joined two other Barnardo boys who were working as Farm Labourers, but in 1904, he died in the Toronto General Hospital of septic peritonitis. He is buried in Parklawn cemetery.

There is a memorial in the Park Lawn Cemetery on Bloor Street, Toronto just west of the Humber River. The inscription reads:

“75 lives, 75 children. Brought here to thrive, instead were forgotten.”

The monument commemorates the all-too-short lives of dozens of British Home Children buried in two mass graves at Park Lawn Cemetery. Among those names, 58 were children known as ‘Barnardo boys’ while the remaining 17 were infants born to some of the young, unwed mothers among their ranks.

The Monument includes a porthole from MS Jadran, which we knew as Captain John’s restaurant when it was located in Toronto harbour. This ship typified a typical ship that brought these children from Britain.

Jessie Nancarrow

Her life in Canada from 1885 to 1947

Arriving in Peterborough

Mount Hope Cemetery



June 1885 party

Ada Chapman, Ada Southwell, Ada Thomas, Ada Vinwood, Agnes Leaver, Alice Edwards, Alice Sweller, Alice Hawkins, Alice Gray, Alice Ward, Amelia Ball, Annie Ball, Annie Kennett, Annie McCarthy, Annie Trewey, Annie Scott, Annie Chessman, Edwina Chubb, Caroline Timpton, Charlotte Lavery, Charlotte Sullivan, Clarice Horsfield, Elizabeth Cane, Elizabeth Fogarty, Elizabeth Romacka, Elizabeth Robinson, Elizabeth Morgan, Elizabeth Green, Elizabeth Fullbrook, Elizabeth Egan, E. Cox, Emily Webb, Emma Claxton, Emma Good, Emma Newman, Emma Kennett, Eva Lane, Frances King, Francis Leach, Georgina Noonan, Horra Rock, Harriet Bidey, Hetty Leaver, Hortense Grant, Julia Grogan, Julia Pope, Kate Morgan, Kate Steel, Kate Winwood, Louisa Morgan, Madal Lindholm, Martha Morgan, Mary Black, Mary Cox, Mary Callan, Mary Green, Mary A Scott, Mary A Taylor, Mary Ann Gray, Maudie Fuller, Miss Fogarty, Miss Chatterwood, Miss Green, Rebecca Pearce, Rhoda Perkins, Rose Lavelle, Ruth Kingham, Sarah Filding, Sarah Martin, Sarah Smith, Susan Ellis, Susannah Vothshaw



Jessie was born in the Truro Workhouse in 1869. The youngest of three. Her Father was a miner who left for Upper Peninsula, Michigan in late 1860, to join his parents. The census records show that the mother and three children were living on Mitchell Hill, Truro in 1871, and that is the last record I could find. In 1885, the Barnardo records show her arriving at Hazelbrae, the Barnardo Home in Peterborough, Ontario.

She was 16, but Barnardo's lists her arrival age as 12, which could suggest that she was very small and malnourished. Jessie completes her service, and marries in 1890, listing her age as 19. Her husband died of TB one year later and she remarries in 1896.

She died in 1947 and is buried in Mount Hope Cemetery, Toronto, where her name is recorded as Nancarrow despite the two marriages. Her DOB shows 1873, not 1869 as per her Birth Certificate.

I have also found records that a James Nancarrow, possibly her brother, was migrated in 1886. He farmed and died in the London, Ontario area in 1923. If it was her brother, they would never meet. I found no trace of their mother or elder sister.

Today, there is a new understanding



The pressure to recognize this period of Canadian History came from an organization named the BHC Advocacy and Research Association. They are in the process of creating a Registry of all the Home Children that came to Canada. Currently, they have 79,000 children listed, and I used this list to prepare this presentation.

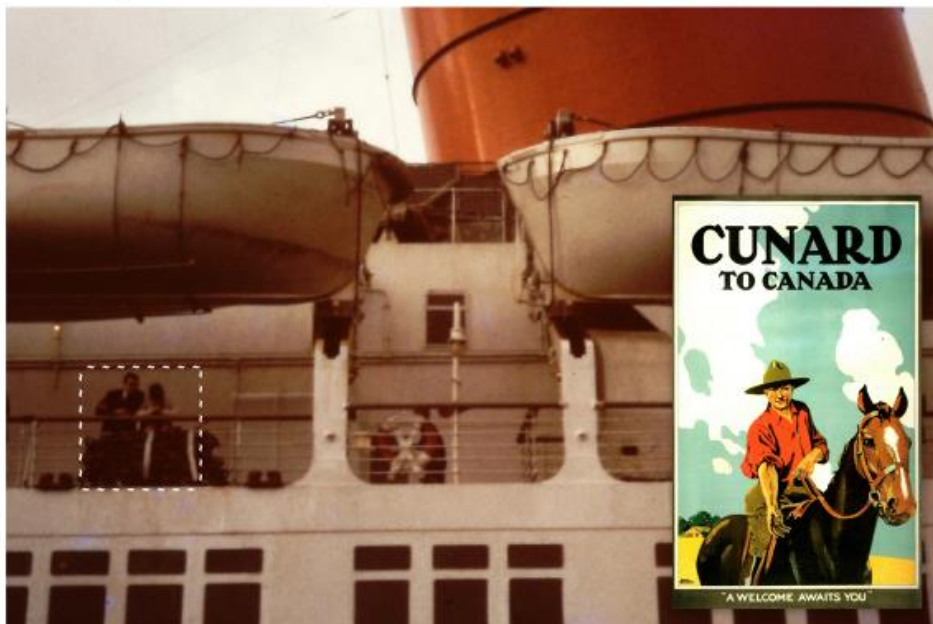
Through the Association, the Government have established September 28th as the British Home Child Day. This was created in 2011 in Ontario and 2018 nationally. And here we have the proclamation from the City of Barrie. This describes the 150th year anniversary of the first children to arrive. Of the 100,000 children, from toddlers to the age of 18, who came to Canada, there are four million descendants in Canada, 10% of the population

The pressure from the organization also led to the issue of the Canadian stamp in 2010, as well as Museum displays, Plaques, books, archives, movies and documentaries. The major task for the Association was to “Break the Silence” and overcome the Stigma, and for this, they used a famous Canadian, Don Cherry, to take the limelight. His

grandfather, and that of Doug Ford (Ontario Premier) and Matt Galloway (CBC Announcer) were home children.

Apologies have been made. From Gordon Brown, on behalf of the UK Government, and from Kevin Rudd on behalf of the Australian Government. The Canadian Government have passed an Apology Motion, but not formally apologised.

And 100 years later - in 1968 - two new migrants



The End

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