Poverty, Emigration And Family: Experiencing Childhood Poverty In Late Nineteenth-Century Manchester

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Abstract

The Manchester and Salford Boys' and Girls' Refuge offered a place of sanctuary for destitute children. It expanded rapidly during the late-nineteenth century and established a number of homes that catered for a range of childhood needs. This article focuses on the experience of children admitted to the Refuge and subsequently emigrated from one of its orphan homes. It considers the processes of child migration by examining the relationships between the home and the family. The analysis questions middle-class ideas about the parenting of poor families, the economic motives behind emigration, and introduces a number of case studies to evaluate whether emigration achieved its goal of leading children towards a respectable life away from the city.

KEYWORDS: childhood, emigration, family, philanthropy, welfare.

Context

In January of 1887 Peter C. (aged 10) and his sister Mary Ann (aged 9) were taken to the Manchester and Salford Boys' and Girls' Refuge where they were placed in the Cheetham Hill Orphan Homes. It had been three years since their mother had died and their father was now suffering illness and was 'supposed in Blackhouse hospital'. The siblings, it appeared, were on the verge of orphanhood when they were taken in by the charity (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). The home in which they were placed was one of six that the Refuge managed on Cheetham Hill, and formed a single element of the institutional provision offered by the organisation that included homes for working boys and girls, a hospital for incurable disabilities and illnesses, a shelter for street children, emigration schemes, and merchant navy training ships on the river Mersey. Even though the homes were privately financed and managed they regularly admitted children from local

Poor Law Unions and provided a sanctuary for those in need of help or living on the streets of the city. The latter often being brought by respectable local individuals such as priests, policemen, and local gentlemen. Despite associations with public institutions at a local level, private establishments such as the Refuge operated largely outside of state regulation (Sheldon 2013: 274). The movement of Peter C. through the charity and his eventual emigration to Canada will provide an emblematic example at the core of this article. His narrative has been constructed through painstaking and complex archival work that links case records, published material, and personal correspondence from the records of two private archives held by charitable organisations. While it represents a solitary example, Peter C. provides a valuable and detailed prism to examine working-class childhood experience in an urban city during the late-nineteenth century.

The period in question is of crucial importance to ideas about the emergence of sheltered, innocent, and modern childhoods in England. According to historians such as Philippe Ariès, Hugh Cunningham, and David Wardle these years defined and shaped popular conceptions as to what a romantic childhood should look like (Ariès 1962; Cunningham 1991; Wardle 1974). Consequently, nineteenth-century social issues relating to children such as labour, welfare, schooling and family life have received detailed scrutiny by scholars such as Jane Humphries, Peter Kirby, Harry Hendrick, and Katrina Honeyman amongst others (Humphries 2010 & 2013; Kirby 2003; Hendrick 1997; Honeyman 2007; Wallace 2010; Lacquer 1976; Crompton 1997). These important works have both reinforced and challenged ideas about what it meant to be a child. For example, Humphries and Kirby have both recognised a decline in child labour as the nineteenth-century progressed, but the former has argued that child workers were more common and at an earlier age than scholars had previously acknowledged (Humphries 2010; Kirby 2003). The analysis here engages with the debate about employment and unearths a vein of continuing support for its practice amongst elements of the philanthropic class.

The history of migration is a crowded field and has an extensive literature. Issues of settlement, the embeddedness of migrants, experience, and return processes have all been investigated, often using the personal correspondence of those involved (Gerber 2006; Fitzpatrick 1995; Kleinig & Richards 2013; Richards 2008; Sinke 2002; Elliot, Gerber & Sinke 2006; Dublin 1993). Within this field of study the history of child migration schemes have been equally popular. Kenneth Bagnall has detailed the dramatic and emotional experience of child immigration to Canada for a general readership (Bagnall 1980). While Joy Parr has provided a detailed critique of child emigration and established the negative connections between philanthropy and child labour (Parr 1980). She has convincingly highlighted the power that philanthropists held over children and families of the poor during the process of emigration and following settlement through the censorship of correspondence back to the homeland (Parr 1980: Chap.4). Roy Parker, Roger Kershaw and Janet Sacks, and Marjorie Kohli provide extensive examinations of the work and practices of the organisations and individuals responsible for emigration programmes (Parker 2008; Kershaw & Sacks 2008; Kohli 2003). Parker concludes that the removal of children from the familiar urban city to the alien countryside of rural Canada was psychologically damaging for the children and thus 'a damning verdict is inescapable' (Parker 2008: 293). These approaches, however, offer scant insight into the personal experiences of those involved. More recently Ellen Boucher, has gone someway

to rectifying this oversight by using oral histories to examine the migration of children to Australia and South Rhodesia. She demonstrates that in the twentieth century a racial element influenced the movement of children to the white dominions and non-white colonies, however this work does not shed much light on those emigrated to Canada before the turn of the century where oral accounts are no longer available (Boucher 2014). Offering a shift in focus, Stephen Constantine has considered the lasting legacy of child migration in modern Canada. He has argued that there is a trend in identifying with historical victims and many modern Canadians relate to their British ancestry even though during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries they were considered toxic and a threat to the emerging Dominion society (Constantine 2003).

It is evidently clear that scholars have established a number of important themes in the history of child migration. Particularly connections between settlement and empire, social policy, child labour, pauperism, and power relationships between philanthropists and the working poor. A peculiarity of the literature is the failure to explore the lived experiences of the children and their families. Since Parr's critique of the emigration programmes much of the literature has focused on telling stories from the perspective of the adults involved. These 'top-down' studies establish the negative impact of child migration both for the settler society and children, but the individuals and their families remain oddly peripheral. When they do feature, their stories are used to display the emotional trauma of separation or to glimpse the mistreatment that a small number of children experienced and thus embellish the horrifying nature of emigration programmes and Victorian philanthropy. From this perspective, the image is one of pauper families being subjected to the whims of middle-class philanthropy with little agency or voice to shape their own destiny. This article goes some way to rectifying such assumptions and introduces the individual experiences of child migrants. The analysis that follows demonstrates that emigration served as a tool that facilitated the removal of the potentially troublesome or economically burdensome from urban areas, and it also highlights the significant roles of children and families in the selection processes of who was sent.

Child migration programmes were operated by numerous charities, organisations, and individuals in nineteenth-century Britain, of which the Refuge was one. Almost all major urban centres had access to migration schemes and they were considered a method of providing fresh starts for children of the poor (Peters 2000). Those involved were fostered with and in some cases informally adopted by Canadian farming families desperately in need of extra hands to help with agricultural labour. It was thought that removing them from the city saved them from an inevitable life of vice and immorality. Such a rationale was promoted and reinforced in the language used by the Refuge about emigration; they stated that it 'permanently saves the children by removing them from their old degrading surroundings' (MCL Annual Report 1895: 23). Thus emphasising the dangers posed in the city and the vital nature of their work in bringing about improvement for the youngsters that they came into contact with.

The migration of children to work on Canadian farms also appealed to bourgeois Victorian ideals of the family. Children were placed with Canadian farming families in rural areas and were thought to be 'settling' the empire (Peters 2000: 79). Joy Parr, however, highlighted the contradiction in using emigration as a means for dealing with pauper children. She observed that the practice was contrary to the reforming atmosphere of nineteenth-century England (Parr 1980: 11). These schemes ran in parallel to child

welfare reforms such as The Factory (1833- 1901) and Elementary Education (1870-1902) Acts that were introduced to protect the rights, development, and welfare of children. The removal of youngsters, in conjunction with the increased legal protection that they were beginning to accrue in English society, has led Parr to suggest that child emigration was the 'dark side' of Victorian evangelicalism (Parr 1980: 11).

A wider lens has been used to examine pauper children and their families in nineteenth-century London by Lydia Murdoch. She argued that children of the poor were often represented as orphans by a reforming and increasingly influential Victorian middle-class, regardless of their family situations. Such a representation meant that a child's tie to pauperism could be severed and bourgeois ideals of domesticity could be instilled (Murdoch 2006); a view supported by Nicola Sheldon in her examination of institutional care for children in the period 1850-1918 (Sheldon 2013: 256). Simultaneously, Murdoch contends that philanthropists worked privately with pauper families to help construct their own ideal of what the working class should look like. There were thus differing private and public faces of philanthropy during the period. Her analysis is restricted to London and Murdoch acknowledges that the experience of the capital cannot be extrapolated to the country as a whole. This investigation contributes to such a topic by focusing on the attitudes of reformers towards children, families, and the empire far outside of the capital in the north-west of England.

The discussion that follows is divided between three sections. The first dealing with the children residing in the homes on Cheetham Hill that were the first stop in the process of emigration; the second considers motives, experiences and the management of pauper children inside the homes; and the final section examines the experiences of the children who entered the home and were subsequently emigrated from it. The records used were created by the orphan homes between the years 1871-1891 and represent one set of data from a broad corpus of material; including applications for relief, casefiles from various homes, financial documents, annual reports, and promotional material that has survived from the various faucets of welfare offered by the Refuge.

The nature of reporting between The Refuge in Manchester and the receiving home in Belleville, Ontario, meant a mass of evidence for each child has been collected. Individual letters and annual reports of the child's progress in Canada were systemically sent back to Manchester. The records for each child admitted and emigrated during the period could possibly span a period of twenty years. A significant amount of data and material is included in each case but the results are rich, detailed, and fascinating insights into the lives of the children that passed through the homes and eventually became child migrants.

The Nature of Orphanhood in Nineteenth-Century Manchester

Peter C. was taken into the Refuge having suffered the loss of his mother and the hospitalization of his father. He entered the home in anticipation of being made an orphan. However, in some Victorian definitions Peter C. was an orphan regardless of the fate of his sick father. Laura Peters has argued that the Victorian definition of an orphan extended to the 'vulnerable, disadvantaged, [and] miserable' (Peters 2000: 1). The children admitted to the Cheetham Hill Orphan Homes ranged from the respectable working class to the destitute poor, they *were not* just the offspring of the residuum. Some

had two surviving parents, while others had lost both. Being a Victorian orphan was a complex and idiosyncratic experience.

This fluidity can be viewed in the statistics regarding parentage. Of the 284 children admitted to the home between the years 1871-1891, there were 20% that had confirmed living parents, 54% had lost both parents, and 26% had unknown parentage. It might be expected that a proportion of 'unknown' parents were alive but the carers of the children, whether extended family, relatives or other institutions, could not confirm their state of health or address. This situation is aptly demonstrated in the case of William S. He was taken into the home aged 5 in 1885. His case-file stated that 'whether this boys [sic] Father + Mother are living or dead is not known' (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). There were a significant proportion of children resident in the home that had living parents and were not orphans in the strictest, traditional, sense.

It was often assumed by contemporaneous observers that children of the urban poor were likely to engage in a life of crime. A belief fuelled by popular literary depictions of 'street urchins' and 'gutter children' (Peters 2000: 37-39). The records of the Cheetham Hill Homes reveal little evidence of delinquency or disruptive behaviour among those that it admitted. There were however, some exceptions. Joseph B. had to be removed to live with his aunt because of 'unruly behaviour' (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). Thomas Y. was said to use vile language (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). While Martha H. was transferred from the girls' home because of 'unruly behaviour' and subsequently emigrated within a week of her arrival (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). But there are no instances of children that had embarked on a life of crime and were brought to the home as criminals. The sample of children reveals that disruptive behaviour was recorded in just 3% of cases (Peters 2000: 9).

Despite limited references to criminality amongst those in the home, a life of crime was thought to be the ultimate destiny for the child of the urban poor in Victorian England. Such an expectation made these children suitable candidates for orphan status and emigration. Many had close links with criminal fraternities and most had previously lived in slum areas of the city where crime was rife (Sheldon 2013: 256). Emigration programmes offered an effective solution to an endemic problem. Consequently, the records reveal evidence of immoral and criminal backgrounds amongst family members and carers, rather than for children themselves. The sample reveals that 19% of children had come from upbringings that were described as 'criminal' or 'bad'. For example, Richard J.'s mother was visited two days before her death, 'she implored that the children might be kept from going to the workhouse' (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). The home promised to provide a home for as many of her children as possible but only Richard was admitted. His case-notes stated that the friends were 'of low disreputable class, the elder brothers and sisters have all gone wrong. Elder brother been in prison, sister Sarah Ann has been in gaol 7 times and is now serving 12 months for felony'(GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). It can thus be considered that Richard was taken in and the others were not because he had not been tainted by criminality and was in need of saving.

There are also examples where parental contact was considered a direct danger, both physically and morally, to the child. Prior to entering the home John F. was said to be living in a den of thieves (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). Joseph B.'s mother was said to be 'bad' and Margaret C.'s mother was in gaol (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). The latter's two sisters were residents of the home; she was so worried about her mother finding

her after release from gaol that she wrote a letter appealing for a place as an orphan. In this case both parents were alive. Rebecca B. was admitted after her mother had been accused of trying to drown a younger child. The language used to describe the case is ambivalent and later entries on the case-file suggest that the mother was falsely accused (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). All of these examples offer evidence of vulnerable children living in close proximity to criminal behaviour that if left unchecked would eventually influence and consume the child.

Not all children, however, came from such morally inadequate upbringings. Walter M.'s mother was 'believed to have been good' (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). He was taken in after a representative of the home 'visited the mother on her dying bed and relieved her anxiety about Walter by promising to take him when she was gone' (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). Subsequently he was migrated to Canada following his mother's death. James and Sarah Ann S. had 'parents believed to have been decent poor people'(GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). There was, however, less information recorded about parents that were noted as being good, so it is difficult to delve deeper into their lives. Some children were more unfortunate and found their way to the home as the victims of criminal behaviour. Charles M. was admitted because his mother was murdered and his father was unknown (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). The man responsible for his mother's death was later executed at the County Gaol at Strangeways. It is clear from the sample that not all children found their way to the charity from deviant or criminal backgrounds and that parents cared for and were concerned about the welfare and upbringing of their offspring. The home was not a warehouse of rogues or delinquents even though half of the children, although classed as orphans, may have had living parents. They were given this status because they did not comply, through no fault of their own, with the middle-class expectations of a 'respectable' working class life (Murdoch 2006).

Relationships, Motives and Processes.

The Cheetham Hill Homes assumed parental responsibility for the upbringing of the children living inside of them. The relationships that were forged by the home with the children and their families, the motives it had for taking in children with surviving parents, and the processes behind the emigration programmes are important elements that need to be examined in order to better understand their operation. A significant factor is the role of working class agency in the utilisation of the home as a welfare resource. The literature has demonstrated that the working poor deployed a range of tactics to keep their heads above water in times of need. For instance, the broad spectrum of clientele that utilised pawnbroking in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Vincent 1991; Tomkins 2003) and the increasing frequency of charitable donations to the poor that helped to supplement incomes (Lloyd 2003; King 2003: pp.238-9). The evidence from the Refuge suggests that their homes were accessed as part of this 'economy of makeshifts' for the working poor. They provided a modicum of relief in times of economic hardship for households or when care arrangements for children had altered (Smith 2012). The lived examples are numerous: Martha C. was taken to the home when her father was admitted to a pauper lunatic asylum (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). Samuel D. had resided with his half-sister but was brought to the home when her husband was out of work and they lost their house (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). Mary Jane M. had been orphaned

for 6 years before being taken to the home, the grandmother had 'supported this child as long as she could, she was then brought to us (or else she must go to the workhouse)' (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). The extant records reveal that over a third of children [37%] had been cared for by close or extended family, demonstrating that institutional care was often the last resort of poor families (Murdoch 2006: 121). From these examples it is clear that when domestic arrangements broke down charitable institutional help was preferable to pauperisation and the workhouse.

The coping strategies of the urban poor are at the forefront of the narratives recorded by the Cheetham Hill Homes. These accounts are detailed and on occasion extensive. Sisters, aunts, and grandparents all cared for children, often for years, signifying the dedication of families to their young and reinforcing ideas of close kinship bonds amongst the poor (Kidd 1999). These children were not deposited immediately but only after alternative care arrangements were attempted and exhausted. Austen M.'s parents had been dead for 7 years before he was sent to the home (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). William W. and his six brothers lived with an aunt who was granted 7/6 by the Poor Law Guardians to look after them. He went to the home and then returned years later, highlighting the temporary nature of relief the home could offer (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). Charles R. had been orphaned for four years (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). Eliza C. had stayed with a neighbour for two years, despite them having eight children their own (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). And, Maggie G. was adopted numerous times by family members but she was returned to the home due to the death of an elderly grandparent, she eventually migrated to Canada (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). Not all children, however, had familial support networks and it was these children that were at the whim of philanthropic reformers.

By returning to the example of Peter C. both the agency of pauper parents and the motives of the home can be explored further. The case-notes give the impression that Peter C.'s situation was fairly common; it was recorded that 'this boy [was] sent to us by Mr J. W. Dixon Boys' Home Blackburn, where Peter had been living', then the details of his parents were recorded and the only other information being that he was emigrated to Canada on April 7th 1887 (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). Through linkage with other records, however, we can see that Peter C.'s case was not so straight forward. The Refuge was not the only charity that sought to provide relief to the children of Manchester. Another was The Catholic Protection and Rescue Society. The Rescue was operated and financed through a number of missions around the city with a purpose of 'saving' Catholic children on the streets of Manchester both spiritually and physically and also to counter the effects of proselytisation from protestant organisations like the Refuge. Peter C. happened to be from a Catholic family and his case was taken up by the Rescue at the request of his father.

The Harvest, the official publication of The Rescue, reported that Peter's father 'in November, 1886, being out of work, he took the children to the Ragged school at Blackburn to be taken care of in a home until he could get work and have the children back to live with him' (SDA *The Harvest* 1889: 23). Firstly, this evidence suggests that Peter's father was not a patient in a hospital as suggested in the records of the Cheetham Hill Homes. Inaccurate information was thus recorded from the outset. It may have been passed to the orphan home from the ragged school to ensure Peter C.'s admission and ensure the burden he placed on them was removed. Alternatively, the orphan home may

have wanted to make Peter C.'s case appear more desperate than it actually was in order to assume control of the child for their own needs. Finally, it might have been that *The Harvest* in its promotional role for the Rescue overlooked the father's stay in hospital to increase the legitimacy of the case in the eyes of its readers. Whatever the motive, it is evident that there were diverse institutional arrangements accessed by the poor in order to provide temporary relief in times of hardship (SDA *The Harvest* 1889: 23).

Children that were institutionalised outside of the Workhouse often struggled to maintain contact with their parents (Murdoch 2006: 94). Private institutions, such as orphan homes, did not allow parents a legal right to remove their children (Murdoch 2006: 98). This is illustrated by the experience of Peter C. In May 1887 his father asked Mr Walkden at the Blackburn Ragged School, where he first left his children, about them. *The Harvest* reported that 'Walkden refused to say where they were. Mr C. said he meant to have them, and was told he must pay four shillings a week for the time they had been in the Home'(SDA *The Harvest* 1889: 253). Peter's father had used the home in a time of hardship, but when he returned to collect his children it was not so easy. However, he persisted and in February 1888 'presented himself before the Committee of the Home and demanded his children' (SDA *The Harvest* 1889: 253). He stated that he was in employment as a weaver and was able to educate and provide a comfortable home for his family (SDA *The Harvest* 1889: 253). Again he met with the response that 'he had to pay the four shillings a week expenses' (SDA *The Harvest* 1889: 253). Mr C. was priced out of being a parent to his child by the home. Peter was far from an orphan or a vulnerable child; he had a loving parent that was persistent in attempting to regain custody of his children. Throughout this process the father was unaware that Peter had already been sent as a child migrant to Canada.

The speed with which Peter was emigrated poses a question as to the motives of the home. Was it really a benevolent institution for the care of underprivileged and needy children or a centre for distributing child labour to the empire? Parr has posited that children were used as an economic commodity and charities failed in their duties towards pauper children (Parr 1980: Chap.4). The case of Peter C. appears to support such a view. He was in the home for only three months before being emigrated. In comparison George and James S. were orphans without living parents and were not sent to Canada until seven years after entering the home (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). The haste with which children that had surviving parents were emigrated is startling. Austen M. was emigrated less than twelve months after admission despite being 'claimed' by a woman that the home refused to accept as his mother (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). Alice C. was also emigrated within a year, but her case was expedited because her mother was awaiting trial and the home feared that her father, who had just been released from gaol, might try and remove her (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). Gertrude M.'s mother when admitted to the workhouse pleaded for her daughter to be sent to the home rather than Poor Law institution. She was emigrated to Canada seven months later (GMCRO: M189/5/2/1-3). Many children only became orphaned or abandoned following their interaction with philanthropists.

Murdoch has argued that there was a systematic effort in late-nineteenth-century London to vilify or erase pauper parents (Murdoch 2006: 6). In this argument the separation of children from their families was designed to appear much like the segregated wards of a workhouse. To Murdoch the representation of pauper children as orphans

or abandoned from abusive parents was part of a broader social trend, aimed at shaping children into model citizens; 'Child welfare reformers increasingly defined citizenship in terms of middle-class domesticity, thereby denying citizenship to large segments of the working, particularly, urban poor' (Murdoch 2006: 7). Thus, the Victorian representation of poor children as 'imagined' orphans was part of a bourgeois civilising mission that sought to eradicate poverty from the streets of England. In the north-west an extension of the same practice can be observed. A core element of shaping individuals into model citizens was the creation and embedding of a work ethic. Consequently, those sent to Canada were expected to be productive but also children that remained in the city had a similar experience. Christina M., William S., and John M. were all sent out to employment in Manchester. The Refuge lamented in 1891 that 'with a population already congested, growing at the rate of nearly half a million every year, how is it possible to find employment, food and clothing for them all?' (MCL Annual Report 1891: 14) Emigration was a tool to meet the imperial need for labour and ease the overcrowding in England's urban centres, but the centrality of work was an extension of the philanthropic discourse of improvement rather than Parr's 'dark side' of Victorian evangelicalism. A different story, however, might be considered for children incapable of working that were often a drain on poor rates for many years, in these cases it was good economic sense to remove them to a faraway land where they no longer could be a burden on local funds (Taylor 2014). Nonetheless, Murdoch's suggested civilising mission was apparent in Manchester as well as London.

A core pillar of improving children was the belief that sending them to be colonial workers was a genuine way to progress their life chances and lead to future happiness. The Refuge argued that 'we feel we cannot do better for any children that come under our care than to place them in good farm homes in the great Dominion of Canada' (MCL Annual Report 1887: 14). Later, in 1894, the annual report stated 'for the class we send out there is a real demand, and for better openings than can be found in this country' (MCL Annual Report 1894: 16). These reports were created to bolster support and increase donations to the Refuge but they also reflected the beliefs and attitudes of those responsible for the institution. To nineteenth-century philanthropists a life of labour and limited education in Canada was a preferential to an existence that relied on the ratepayer or crime for income (Parr 1980: 108-9). Such a world view, however, was paradoxical to the reforming atmosphere in England that saw The Factory Acts limit the hours a child could work and The Education Acts from 1870 legislating for increased levels of education for all. The children of the orphan homes on Cheetham Hill were suitable for emigration because their family ties had been severed and their poverty meant they had no means to resist the process if they wanted. In the minds of the philanthropist the children were being saved and at the same time transformed into useful imperial citizens.

'Getting along well in every respect': Experiencing Migration.

The Manchester and Salford Refuge dealt with roughly 125,000 children in the city between the years 1871-1920. Of these just 2,129 were emigrated. Almost all passed through the orphan homes at Cheetham Hill. It is to the lived experience of these children that

the analysis now turns. The emigration programmes were nearly always viewed in a positive light until well in to the twentieth century. In 1905, when the process of emigrating pauper children from the north-west of England was well established, *The Manchester Guardian* reported that 'sixty-two Manchester boys set out from Liverpool yesterday to start a new life in Canada. Full of the excited joy of an unwonted experience, they left the old country with smiling faces' (MCL *The Manchester Guardian* 1905: 12). Such positivity usually permeated the reports that were sent back from Canada documenting the progress of each child migrant. Consequently, it is difficult to filter the voice of the child through the statements about conduct, employability, and education that were deemed so important to those responsible for reporting on the children.

The annual inspection report for Margaret M. provides such evidence of the success of the programme. On July 20th 1894 it was stated, 'Margaret has a very comfortable home Mrs T brought up one of our boys who is now married and runs the farm for her. Margt is happy and getting along well in every respect. Attends Church and Sunday School regularly' (GMCRO M189/7/4/1/31). The detail on the individual in this report is scant. We are told more about the success of Mrs T. in fostering not one but two child immigrants. It also highlights the previous successes of the programme implying that migrant children lived happy and successful lives. We are told that Margaret was happy and attended Church and Sunday School but we have no knowledge of her social, economic or personal development. She was said to be 'getting along well in every respect', but was this the opinion of Margaret herself, the foster parent or the report's author? If the latter this statement can only be based on limited observations of the child in combination with input from the child and/or foster parent.

The style of reporting on children across the corpus of records is formulaic and represents an assessment of the suitability of the home and foster parents rather than the progress of the individual. The report of Hannah B. on June 12th 1891 demonstrates this point. She was visited by Miss Smithurst who stated that 'Hannah is in an excellent home with very nice superior people who are exceedingly kind to her. She has grown and improved very much in every way' (GMCRO M189/7/4/1/14). Again little information about the child is provided. Thus while the reporting back to the charity in Manchester was extensive, it is also limited in its usefulness to historians seeking to understand the experience of child migration.

The reports from the Canadian distributing home without exception present the foster homes positively. Tales of children being worked too hard, kept in unhygienic or unacceptable conditions, or treated unfairly or harshly never emerge. This was a result of the child's voice being suppressed by the bureaucratic machine of the receiving home that censored and copied all letters and reports before they were sent back to England. When negative experiences of emigration did surface they were blamed on the child, not the home. This is evident in the case of Charles H. who left England in 1887. He was visited in his foster home by Edward Langley on June 9th 1891 who stated 'very good home and kind people they have done a great deal for Charlie but he does not try to help them. Has very bad manners and will not try to get on at school. They have nothing to say in his favour' (GMCRO M189/7/4/1/24). Much like the case of Margaret M. there is little detail. We have no idea how Charles was treated or the 'great deal' that the foster parents had done for him. Again the child's voice was conspicuously absent. There was no explanation offered for the child's recalcitrance; all that is apparent is that this was a

bad boy in a good home. It was stated in a previous report, March 12 1890, conducted by James L., the foster parent, that 'Charles [is] very stupid at learning does not even know the clock yet' (GMCRO M189/7/4/1/24). The attitude of the child was most likely affected by the treatment and opinion held of him in the home, although there is no acknowledgement of this in the extant records. The child as an individual was a secondary concern throughout the process of emigration. They were sent to Canada because it allowed the severing of ties to urban living and a better value alternative to workhouse care in England. Once there children were expected to be good workers and fit well with a domestic dynamic that many of them were not used too, surprisingly the records suggest that the majority adapted well. However, when things went sour it was the fault of the youngster rather than the alien environment that they were expected to adjust to.

The economic experience of migration must also be considered. The children were expected to work in Canada, boys as farm hands and girls in domestic service. What happened to the child that was incapable, whether through ill health, disability or lack of strength, to undertake the work demanded of them? Again this was a varied experience. Sarah B. was placed in a home with Duncan M. a farmer in southern Ontario, while there 'she had been very sick and only able just able to walk around a little. The doctor gave up hope a month ago but evidently she will recover. Splendid home' (GMCRO M189/7/1/8). Sarah B. was fortunate in the fact that she recovered and the family tolerated her illness, keeping her in the foster home rather than returning to be redistributed.

The experience of Ada B. was not as positive. She was 'a tall strong girl but not specially bright', and was returned to the distributing home because 'she made and kept undesirable acquaintances'(GMCRO M189/7/4/12). In her next home she was returned because she was 'very loud and going out at nights and when not allowed to do so becomes saucy and impudent'(GMCRO M189/7/4/12). Ada was eventually moved through three more homes before a report stated that 'her deafness is somewhat against her so that she appears rather stupid' (GMCRO M189/7/4/12). Later it was stated that 'Ada is not getting on at all well. She is still very deaf which makes her appear stupid but she seems to have no mental ability whatever. She is very dirty and untidy and cannot be taught to do even simple household duties with any satisfaction' (GMCRO M189/7/4/12). Ada B.'s inability to settle appears to have been because she was suffering from one or more disabilities. These were absent from earlier reports and suggest that fostering families wanted fit and healthy children and were unwilling to invest time and energy in those incapable of assimilating with life on a farm.

The example of Peter C. provides the final examination of migrant experience. In his report for 1888, he was said to be 'a good boy and getting on well is getting a good schooling…goes with the family to church and Sunday school in fact every where they go' (GMCRO M189/5/2/1-3). It can be seen that Peter and his experiences were very much on the periphery of this report. The content was again designed to amplify the success of the emigration programme, demonstrating the child to be in better circumstances than they were in England. There was a letter sent from Peter C. to England in February 1889, at the very time that his father was trying to remove him from the home in Manchester. In the correspondence Peter stated 'I got a letter from Mr Walken [sic] last week and I was glad to hear that my sister had got such a good place. I was very sorry to hear that my father is no better since I left' (GMCRO M189/5/2/1-3). The letter

from Mr Walkden obviously had kept Peter in the dark about the efforts of his father to have him returned.

Later reports provide limited detail into the experience of the child. Peter's father after learning that his son had been emigrated launched a successful legal battle, with the support of The Rescue, to have Peter returned to England. Mr C. regained the custody of his daughter who had been boarded out with a family in Lancashire and the court decided that he could communicate with Peter to ascertain his wishes about returning to England. The following June (1890), Peter's annual report back to the home in Manchester noted 'he seems quite discontented without being able to give a good reason. Home letters have made him wish to return to Manchester' (GMCRO M189/5/2/1-3). The decision of the court is not acknowledged by the receiving home. While there was obviously contact from England and presumably a response from Peter, he did not return to Manchester and annual reports took place for him until he reached the age of 23 in 1900. In all his time in Canada Peter remained in the same foster home, so we must assume that he was happy and found comfort there. Peter C. was taken from a father that was willing to be responsible for his welfare and education and was sent to Canada. This removal was the result of an economic downturn that affected the father's ability to work and the actions of philanthropists that valued displacement over supporting families in the domestic environment. In this instance the timing may have been significant. Peter was turning fourteen and in the eyes of Victorian society becoming a man. His decision to stay may have been based on him moving forward rather than returning to what was now the unknown; in terms of carving out a life for oneself Canada had become the familiar to an adult Peter and Manchester the dangerous urban unknown.

Conclusions

The lessons to be drawn from these cases are both particular and general. Dealing with the former, it can be seen that the literature has taken a too narrow approach by neglecting the lived experiences of the children sent from orphan homes in favour of examinations of the adults and schemes that coordinated migration. Children of the poor were not only at danger from the vices of the city, but also at risk of being exported to the empire by an overly zealous philanthropic class. It is evident, dealing with the latter, that the history of child emigration programmes had a much more general impact extending beyond the experiences of children and the poor, to issues of employment, life-cycle poverty, welfare, and religion.

The case of Peter C. represents the exploitation of a working-class family by a philanthropic class intent on shaping and 'improving' the lives of youngsters that it came into contact with. Peter C.'s father had not agreed to his emigration and only was informed of it after he returned to take his children home. In this example the institution of the family was shattered because the child was considered to be in need of a 'better' life. The narrative can also be read as an attempt to extend the practice of child labour at a very time when it was becoming reviled in England. Thus our ideas about Victorian concepts of childhood in a modern sense must be revised. Children from Manchester were being exported as workers to Canada well into the twentieth century. These children did not experience the

sheltered and innocent childhood of the Victorian ideal, but rather a childhood of hard physical labour far away from their family and friends. Furthermore, Peter C. was not a child of the criminal class, nor was he part of the residuum living in slum areas of the city. His father was a weaver that in a time of temporary hardship sought institutional support for his family. The experience of Peter C. and his family highlights the vulnerability of working class families to shifts in employment and industry during the period.

The evidence here shows that coping strategies of the poor were exploited. Peter C. provides a detailed example that embodies the core arguments of this research. Children's homes and institutions of welfare were utilised by families to provide temporary relief for their young. Such strategic use was in turn abused by private homes that made it difficult for families to gain access to their children, subsequently some were sent to Canada. Murdoch has suggested that this was a process of instilling middle-class values of domesticity on pauper children in order to shape them into model citizens of the Empire (Murdoch 2006). She acknowledges the existence of emigration programmes during the period but they are not the focus of her research. A detailed examination demonstrates that emigration did not fit with the middle-class attempt at civilising children that Murdoch found in England. While the motive for emigration was to improve the position of those that were thought to have a bleak future in Manchester, there was also an economic dimension. Children were taken in by the home and sent to Canada to work in order to ease the burden on local poor rates and provide extra sets of hands in the sparsely populated dominion, a reality that challenged reforming ideas about childhood in the late-nineteenth century.

This article's conclusions have a significant impact on the histories of both emigration and childhood. It can be seen that the children selected for emigration were not just the deprived or depraved. Emigration was a tool used to exploit the vulnerability of working class families, an issue that the historiography has not adequately explored. A key element of exploitation was the development of orphan status not as an objective fact but a cultural construct (Murdoch 2006). We can learn from the evidence presented here that the process of emigration was far more complex than has previously been acknowledged and the role of families, as well as reformers, are key areas that require further exploration.

Acknowledgements

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