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Historic inspection practices and children's experiences of residential care, 1945-1980

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Abstract

In January of 1965 Quarrier's Homes was inspected by the Child Care and Probation Inspectorate. It was one of the most extensive – and damning – inspections of a children's home at that time. Many of the criticisms relating to staff practices and organisational failures were an open secret amongst the civil service in Scotland since at least the 1940s and would continue to be repeated until the 1980s. The testimony of those who were formerly in the care of Quarrier's Homes, heard before the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, reveals a considerable gulf between the priorities and perspectives of children and those who delivered and regulated their care. This article reflects on historic inspection practices and the regulation of children's residential care in the decades following the end of the Second World War. Using the 1965 inspection of Quarrier's Homes as an illustrative case study, this article finds that many voluntary children's homes were not effectively regulated, and the Inspectorate had little influence over day-to-day caregiving practices and therefore on children's experiences of care. It finds that a focus on children's physical needs by the Inspectorate contributed to the catastrophic failure of many voluntary children's homes to meet the emotional needs of the children in their care.

Keywords

History, children's homes, orphanages, inspection, regulation, twentieth century, Scotland

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Introduction

In January of 1965 Quarrier's Homes, the largest voluntary children's home in Scotland, was inspected by the Child Care and Probation Inspectorate. It was one of the most extensive – and damning – inspections of a children's home at that time. Over the course of two weeks, a team of inspectors observed the children at various times of the day; they interviewed all members of staff who were looking after the children, they ate meals in the cottages, visited the school, the nursery, and the hospital, and consulted with senior members of the organisation. The result was a highly astute and critical inspection report. And yet, the report appears to have had minimal influence on the organisational culture or caregiving practices at Quarrier's, with some of those same criticisms continually repeated until the Homes' closure in the 1980s. The testimony of those who were formerly in the care of Quarrier's Homes, heard before the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCIA) (hereafter the Inquiry), reveals a considerable gulf between the priorities and perspectives of children and those who delivered and regulated their care.

Since the 1990s the number of official inquiries into the historic abuse of children in care has proliferated (Sköld & Swain, 2015). Previously, there were few opportunities for survivors of abuse in institutional care to be heard. Philanthropic institutions such as Quarrier's went to great lengths to cultivate a positive image in the public eye, and governing boards went to great lengths to protect their reputation when scandal did arise (Swain, 2018). The public narrative on institutional care in Scotland was largely dominated by the organisations themselves, who bolstered their profiles through fundraising activities covered by local press and various printed promotional materials. The testimony of those who were formerly in institutional care challenges the narratives of institutions themselves, but also, in some instances, of those who inspected and regulated them.

Using the 1965 inspection of Quarrier's Homes as an illustrative case study, this article explores historic inspection practices and the regulation of residential childcare in the decades following the end of the Second World War. It finds that

voluntary children's homes were not effectively regulated, and the Inspectorate had little influence over day-to-day caregiving practices and therefore on children's experiences of care.

A brief history of Quarrier's Homes (1878-1989)

Quarrier's Homes, known until 1958 as the Orphan Homes of Scotland, was a self-contained village of individual cottages in the Bridge of Weir. The Homes were founded by philanthropist William Quarrier, who opened the doors of the first two cottages in 1878. The establishment of Quarrier's Homes was part of the wider expansion of residential childcare in Scotland in the late nineteenth century (Kendrick, 2022). Over time, the Village grew to include almost 40 cottages, a school and the Mount Zion Church. The Village was geographically and culturally isolated, with some residents rarely venturing outside its confines. For some children, this was experienced as a feeling of safety, but for others, this could feel suffocating. For instance, 'Alan' (b.1957), a former resident of Quarrier's, told the Inquiry:

Everything was self-contained in Quarrier's. You didn't need to go outside the village for anything because everything was there. They had a bakery, a clothes maker, a shop, a church and a hospital. You were part of the world but you weren't part of the world at the same time. (SCAI, witness statement of 'Alan', b.1957, p. 2)

In the early twentieth century, Quarrier's Village was home to 1,500 children. By the time of the 1965 inspection, there were around 500 children under the care of this institution (NRS, ED11/708/1). Many local authorities were heavily reliant on Quarrier's to provide residential care for children under their care. Indeed, since the end of the Second World War, on average, Quarrier's provided 1 in 7 of all residential childcare places in Scotland. In over 100 years of operation, more than 30,000 children passed through Quarrier's doors. In short, Quarrier's Homes was a significant part of Scotland's care 'system' for much of the twentieth century.

Quarrier's Homes before the 1965 inspection

Poor practice

Poor practice at Quarrier's was widely known about amongst the civil service and local authorities since at least the 1940s. For instance, one Scottish Home Department internal memo, dated 1951, notes that the County of Renfrew Children's Officer no longer wanted to place his 'families' in the Orphan Homes, as it was known then, as he 'is not satisfied with the progress, educational or otherwise, that his children were making in O.H.S.' (NRS, ED11/288). In response, one civil servant remarked: 'Here is a long history relating to Orphan Homes and much criticism.' (NRS, ED11/288) That same year, a report by the Senior Psychologist of Renfrew, following the examination of children attending the Orphan Homes School, described internally as 'rather a shocker', found that children's intelligence – as measured by IQ tests - deteriorated the longer they stayed in the Homes (NRS, ED11/288). The concerns surrounding the adverse impact of Quarrier's practices on children's development was perhaps best summarised by the then Headmaster in 1946, who said: 'The dead hand of the past lies too heavy on the Homes' (NRS, ED11/161).

Many practices that were considered outmoded in the 1940s continued at Quarrier's until the 1970s, and perhaps later in some cottages. As the UK witnessed significant legislative, cultural and social shifts in relation to children following 1945 (see Hendrick, 2003), the culture at Quarrier's was marred by complete inertia and suspicion towards 'outsiders'. Its inability to adapt and fundamentally change its original model of care ultimately led to its closure as a voluntary children's home. The significant move away from residential care towards boarding-out or foster care, particularly marked after the 1970s, (see Abrams, 1998) presented an existential crisis for Quarrier's.

Staff training and recruitment

Before the 1960s there was very little formal training available for those looking after children. In 1960, for example, there were fewer than 20 trained childcare staff in all of Scotland's local authorities (Abrams & Fleming, 2019). Many of

those staffing children's homes were drawn from the ranks of ex-military or were former nurses (Abrams & Fleming, 2019). And in Quarrier's, very few houseparents had formal training, with many viewing it as a Christian vocation, rather than a profession. A number of houseparents had grown up in Quarrier's themselves, and for the purposes of recruitment, having grown up in Quarrier's was viewed as adequate experience for the position of houseparent. For instance, 'Alison' (b.1950) told the Inquiry: 'I had no training or qualifications in caring for children. Quarriers said that I had plenty of experience because I had been brought up in Quarriers' (SCAI, witness statement of 'Alison', b.1950, p. 5). Due to a lack of scrutiny of individual cottages, many outmoded and even harmful practices became embedded and transmitted from one generation to the next.

Inspections of voluntary homes

Before 1968, inspections of voluntary homes, such as Quarrier's, were largely carried out by the local authority children's departments, but only with respect to the children whom they had placed there. The Scottish Home Department had overall responsibility for the regulation and inspection of children's homes. Most inspections were carried out over the course of one or two days with what can only be described as a 'light touch'. Children's homes were generally given ample notice of a visit, although the Inspectorate possessed the power to turn up unannounced. 'Finlay', a former resident of Quarrier's, told the Inquiry:

> I don't remember seeing inspectors or there being inspections. I think it was like a closed shop. Nobody came in. There was nobody who came in from the outside to ask us how we were getting on. There were visitors from the charity who came to Quarrier's, but they never spoke to us. They were shown about and left with the impression that it was a wonderful place for the children. Nobody ever spoke to us or asked us our opinion. You didn't have an opinion anyway. You were told what your opinion was. (SCAI, witness statement of 'Finlay', p. 6)

It was not uncommon for inspections to take place while the children were attending school, meaning that children were not seen and certainly not spoken to by inspectors.

The hostility towards 'outsiders' was not unique to Quarrier's; other voluntary homes operated in a similar way. For example, Smyllum Park Orphanage, a Catholic voluntary home in Lanark, was remembered by former Children's Officer at Dingwall, James (b.1925) to be discouraging of attempts to build relationships with the children. James told the Inquiry:

> …at that time all the Catholic establishments had the same reputation. They felt that you were intruding. It was their job and they didn't want you interfering. The sad thing was that this was accepted by the social work department that they were different from other residential homes. (SCAI, witness statement of James Murray Haddow, b.1925, p. 4)

There was a reluctance on the part of inspectors to disturb this dynamic as many local authorities were reliant on voluntary children's homes. For example, Glasgow Children's Department, one of the largest in Britain, was chronically underfunded, understaffed and unable to provide aftercare. An inspection of its childcare service revealed that in May 1965 Glasgow's Children's Department had 2,413 children under its care and a further 3,433 children under supervision in their own homes (NRS, ED11/669/1). The Department was staffed by a total of only 21 professional staff. One Child Care Officer had a case load of 253 (NRS, ED11/669/1). The reliance on Quarrier's as a residential care provider was a barrier to forcing organisational change. Dr Davidson, then Director of Quarrier's Homes, told an inspector in 1965 that he 'is well aware of the disadvantages of the big institution' but referred to the demand for places (NRS, ED11/708/1). In 1964/65 96% of all admissions to Quarrier's were from local authority children's departments (NRS, ED11/708/1).

The 1965 inspection of Quarrier's Homes

The system of individual cottages, headed up by houseparents, was intended to replicate family relationships. Houseparents were given almost total autonomy in

their individual cottages. 'William', a former resident of Quarrier's, told the Inquiry: 'There were no inspections of Quarriers that I know of and I never had or saw a social worker. Your life was run solely by your house parents.' (SCAI, witness statement of 'William', p. 8) The level of autonomy given to houseparents at Quarrier's meant that children could have vastly different experiences of growing up there. When this worked well, children could experience a relatively stable and happy upbringing at Quarrier's. When this did not work, however, the Quarrier's model of care made children extremely vulnerable to mistreatment, abuse and exploitation.

The disparity between cottages was explicitly recognised in the 1965 inspection report. It found that the standards of care ranged from 'exceptional' in some cottages to 'unsatisfactory' in others. The inspectors concluded:

> For the children in care at Quarriers Homes, life in the cottages is determined by their individual capacities, disabilities and needs, by the wide standards of care from one cottage to another, by the overriding conditions of location and general organisation, and by the survival, mitigated in many cases by the common sense, energy and fortitude of individual houseparents, of outmoded traditions and practices. (NRS, ED11/708/1)

One such cottage deemed to be 'exceptional' by inspectors, was Cottage 5, home at that time to 12 children looked after by a housemother and housefather. The houseparents were described by the inspector as being 'a young couple' in their 'early 30's' with two children of their own. As a couple, they were noted as being 'well suited' and both 'devoted to the children' (NRS, ED11/708/1). The inspector was impressed by their relationship with the children. The housemother of Cottage 5, the inspector said, was 'a gentle warm-hearted woman, and handles the little ones […] with affectionate care' (NRS, ED11/708/1). And the housefather was described as a 'bright happy person, with a sense of humour, he is very active and hard-working and very acceptable to the children' (NRS, ED11/708/1). The inspector shared a meal with the children and the houseparents in the 'cosy kitchen' and found the children to be 'chatty' and 'the occasion a social one' (NRS, ED11/708/1). Unusually for an

inspection, the quality and the quantity of the food was not the focus, but the dynamics of cottage life.

In the early evening the inspector observed the children 'spread themselves between the playroom and sitting room' where there was 'plenty of play equipment, a record player, a shop, modelling material, games and books.' (NRS, ED11/708/1) Not only that, but the houseparents were 'involved in all that the children were doing' and '[a]ll were happy and relaxed' (NRS, ED11/708/1). This intimate picture of a relaxed, playful evening in Cottage 5 was in stark contrast to what was observed in some of the other cottages. For instance, Cottage 7 was home to 14 children who were looked after by a single housemother who had been at Quarrier's since 1935. The housemother of Cottage 7 was described by the inspector as 'a forbidding woman, stern and scrupulously just' (NRS, ED11/708/1). Unlike Cottage 5, this Home was described as 'efficient' and although there was 'real effort to make the children comfortable […] stimulus, fun, interest and recreation are at a low ebb' (NRS, ED11/708/1). The chatty mealtimes of Cottage 5 stood out in comparison to some of the other cottages where inspectors found that 'the children lined up to have hands inspected before filing in to eat.' (NRS, ED11/708/1)

On the standard of care in Cottage 5, the inspector concluded that:

> [the houseparents of Cottage 5] are a good example of a couple, with very ordinary intelligence but with big hearts, hardworking and using to the full every quality and skill they have in being good parents to the children and good members of the community. It was interesting that the school master, the nursery matron and the nursery school staff, all mentioned this couple as providing exceptional standard of care. (NRS, ED11/708/1)

In 2001, some 36 years after this report was written, the housefather of Cottage 5 was found guilty on two charges of rape, nine charges of lewd, indecent and libidinous practices, nine charges of assault and one charge of shameless indecency against a number of girls at Quarrier's Homes between 1961 and 1968. He was a houseparent at Quarrier's from 1961 to 1968. He went on to

become a senior social worker. However, this is not to suggest that the inspectors should have been alert to potential signs of sexual abuse, as this would be an anachronism and was simply not reflective of practices at the time (see Bingham, 2019; Delap, 2018). It is not a case of holding those in the past to the standards of today, but rather, it highlights the failures of an inspection system that did not seek the perspectives of children. Inspection reports, as with all records authored by child welfare professionals, were written by and for adults.

The testimony of those who were formerly in care can, at times, corroborate or confirm what we find in archival records, but more often than not, it disrupts, undermines and even obliterates the narratives found in the records of child welfare professionals. The 1965 inspection of Quarrier's Homes was, overall, highly critical and offered astute observations into the inner workings of an organisation that was largely hostile to 'outsiders'. The foresight and perceptiveness of the inspectors lends credibility to its positive analysis that may otherwise have been read with a more critical lens.

An entrenched dynamic between the Inspectorate and voluntary children's homes where inspectors were reluctant to 'interfere' meant that inspections were only able to scratch the surface of an institutional regime. And Quarrier's, which faced increasing criticism of its outmoded model of care after 1965, focused much energy on preventing reputational damage. Ian Brodie (b.1950), a former in-house social worker at Quarrier's (1977-1985), told the Inquiry: 'the public image was more important than the private reality.' (SCAI, Witness statement of Ian Brodie, b.1950, p. 5) It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that 'Troy' (b.1951), a former resident of Quarrier's, said: 'Our meals changed when someone came to visit. A lot of falsifying went on in that place. If someone came we were told by [redacted] say we loved it and to be on our best behaviour.' (SCAI, witness statement of 'Troy', b.1951, p. 8) Again, this was not unique to Quarrier's, with one former resident of Nazareth House, Glasgow, a Catholic voluntary home, telling the Inquiry that 'fictional menus' were put out for inspections, alongside 'teddies', 'nice little rugs at the side of the beds' and 'nice pyjamas folded up' which were only brought out for the benefit of inspectors

(SCAI, witness statement of 'Poppy', b.1944, p. 11). The picture painted by the official records does not always reflect what it was really like for children.

The lack of oversight and regulation, both internally by Quarrier's and externally, by the inspectorate, had grave consequences for some of those who were in the care of Quarrier's throughout the twentieth century. Children in the care of Quarrier's Homes suffered emotional, physical and sexual abuse at the hands of those who were meant to look after them (SCAI 2020; Shaw, 2011). There were a number of organisational failures that meant individuals were able to abuse children at Quarrier's; on an organisational rather than individual level, children were exploited in a number of ways by Quarrier's.

In one of the most egregious examples of the failures of the historic inspection system, Dr Davidson, then Director of Quarrier's, was able to inflict experimental medical treatment on children at Quarrier's over the course of a decade without the knowledge of the Scottish Home Department. And when this did come to their attention, neither Quarrier's nor Dr Davidson faced any consequences. In a 1955 paper, Dr Davidson, alongside the Deputy Council Medical Officer for Renfrew and the Area Supervising Tuberculosis Physician for Renfrewshire, described an ongoing 'investigation' being carried out at the Orphan Homes of Scotland; of the 783 children living in the Homes between the ages of one and 15, every single child was included in the experiment (Frew, Davidson & Reid, 1955). Around half of the children were given the B.C.G. vaccine in the 'routine intradermal manner' and the other half given the vole bacillus vaccine 'by multiple puncture' (Frew, Davidson & Reid, 1955). The latter was described in the paper as being administered by a 'spring-loaded gun which […] projects 40 needles through a predetermined distance' (Frew, Davidson & Reid, 1955). Although the authors note that the children felt 'little pain' due to this method of administration, 100% of the children given the vole vaccine in the intradermal method developed 'deep ulcers' and 45% went on to develop abscesses which took between 14 and 28 weeks to heal (Frew, Davidson & Reid, 1955). To put it another way, the children suffered from painful pus-filled abscesses for between three and six months. The paper states that there was 'very satisfactory healing which followed the admittedly very severe local reactions' (Frew, Davidson &

Reid, 1955). 'Finlay', whose date of birth is undisclosed but whose testimony suggests he was part of the tuberculosis vaccine trial in the early 1950s, told the Inquiry:

> I got injections because I had scabs on my arms. I think they were experimenting on me. It's the only reason I can think of. I remember these doctors came to Quarriers from Edinburgh to do this. It was outside people. They came every week to measure the size of the scabs with a ruler […] I think it was something to do with TB. (SCAI, witness statement of 'Finlay', p. 9)

Following the publication of the paper in *The British Medical Journal*, the front page of *The London Daily Herald* featured a story by *Glasgow Herald* reporter, Douglas Long, under the headline '600 CHILDREN WERE USED AS GUINEA PIGS' (Daily Herald, 5 February 1955). It told how 600 children living in what was then known as the Orphan Homes of Scotland had been, for three years, subjected to experiments for the purposes of a new tuberculosis vaccine. The Scottish Home Department told the reporter: 'We were not aware that this experiment was being carried out. There is no question of our allowing children to be used for experimental purposes' (Daily Herald, 5 February 1955). In short, the body responsible for the oversight, regulation and inspection of Quarrier's was unaware that for three years over 600 children were subjected to an experimental vaccine that caused severe reactions in several hundred children. Dr Davidson faced no consequences for this. In fact, the following year he would become the Director of Quarrier's.

The 1965 inspection report of Quarrier's criticised Dr Davidson as a 'remote' and 'intellectually autocratic' person who has 'failed to give sufficient leadership' or to 'improve organisation' (NRS, ED11/708/1). Neither the 1955 controversy over the vaccine experiments, which were described by a Glasgow MP in the House of Commons as having 'provoked a great deal of disturbance in the public mind in Scotland' (Mr Rankin to Mr Stuart, House of Commons, 15 March 1955), nor the highly critical 1965 Scottish Home Department report damaged Dr Davidson's position at Quarrier's, where he remained until 1974. Moreover, there is little evidence that the culture at Quarrier's fundamentally altered under new

leadership after 1974. Ian Brodie, in reference to the 1965 report, told the Inquiry: 'What surprises me is that while I was there nobody mentioned a report which very much questioned the continuation of the village. The village model was seen as fundamental to Quarriers…' (SCAI, witness statement of Ian Brodie, p. 32). In the 12 years between the 1965 inspection and Ian Brodie's arrival at Quarrier's, he found that little had changed and many of the fundamental issues identified by the report remained. This damning report which deemed Quarrier's to be a 'defective organisation' was not only lost to institutional memory but had had no discernible impact on Quarrier's organisational culture or caregiving practices.

Conclusion

Voluntary children's homes played a significant role in Scotland's care 'system' for much of the twentieth century, with Quarrier's being the largest institution. A significant number of children were abused and exploited while they were in the care of Quarrier's Homes. As private arrangements, whereby children's families placed and paid for their children's care, became increasingly obsolete by the mid-1960s, local authorities were ultimately responsible for most children in Quarrier's by 1965. Poor practice in Quarrier's was an open secret amongst child welfare professionals since as early as the 1940s, and yet local authorities continued to place children there until the 1980s. Quarrier's Homes was effectively unregulated for most of its operational history. For children, this meant they were subjected to archaic and abusive caregiving practices, an outmoded model of care, a particularly punitive disciplinary regime, and isolation that made them extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation as children, and as young people leaving care. Inspectors, and many of the homes in which they inspected, continued to focus solely on children's physical needs. Inspections often looked to the quantifiable, the quality and quantity of food, the number of beds, baths and books. And yet, when we listen to those who were formerly in the care of homes such as Quarrier's we overwhelmingly hear that it is emotional needs that were most important to children. Inspectors were able to record ounces of milk, observe and record how clean the kitchen was or how

neat the children's clothes were, but being read a bedtime story or a reassuring squeeze of the hand could not easily be counted.

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Amanda Gavin is a doctoral researcher in History at the University of Glasgow and a visiting researcher at the University of Edinburgh. Her research looks at children's experiences of the care 'system' in Scotland since 1945 and seeks to place the perspectives of children and the memories of Care Experienced people at its centre, rather than those of child welfare professionals in the past. Her research is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.