

Village Echoes

We are all familiar with the Dr Barnardo's homes for waifs and strays established by Irishman Thomas Barnardo who opened his first home for destitute boys in London's East End in 1870. Here the boys were taught subjects such as carpentry, metalwork and shoemaking with a view to providing them with the necessary skills to go on to apprenticeships and further their chances of employment. Three years later he opened a home for girls at Mossford Lodge, Barkingside.

In 1887 he tried a new approach in providing for children needing care. He called it "Boarding Out". Today we know it better as fostering. The idea was that children would be sent to board with families in rural communities where they would gain improved health, attend the local school and generally get a better start in life. Initially he sent 320 boys from London's East End to live with families in rural communities in the south and east of England. Within two years this number had doubled and, by the time of Barnardo's death in 1905, more than 4,000 Barnardo's children were in foster care.

In Goudhurst and Kilndown it is possible to use the 1901 and 1911 censuses to try and identify such children in our community. In 1901 there were 13 children (seven boys and six girls) specifically described as "Barnardo's" children living with families in the parish, but only four such children on the 1911 census. However, both censuses also include a number of children described as "boarders", with a birthplace "not known" and who are therefore evidently in a similar situation.

It should also be noted that the families who took in these children (there was some financial incentive) were not the well-off but farm labourers, gardeners, shepherds, and tradesmen such as the blacksmith and saddler. Many were elderly, such as 77 year old Samuel Apps in North Road, whose household in 1901 consisted of himself, his wife, a granddaughter aged six, two Barnardo's children aged eight and six and an adult boarder.

Several families boarded more than one child with ages ranging between one and eleven years. For example, in 1911, Thomas Goodsell in Church Road gave a home to brothers William and Frederick Henson, aged nine and seven, while farmer Albert Frost living on the Kilndown/Flimwell boundary gave a home to three girls aged between six and ten whose birthplaces were given as Manchester, Newcastle and London. Only one Barnardo's child, Alfred James Lewis, appears in both the 1901 and 1911 censuses: he was living with the Stevens family in Trowswell Cottages. Alfred was born in London at the end of 1899 and must have been placed with the family at a very early age.

It is not known what happened to these children, or how long the majority of them lived in the parish. It is hoped, however, that their boarding out did give them the better start in life that Dr Barnardo intended.

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