

Middlemore Homes

Notes made from 'One Hundred years of Child Care'

- First homes on St. Luke's Road (2 small houses) opened by John Middlemore in **September 1872**.
- **December 1872** – a home for girls was opened at 36 Spring Street, a home for small boys opened at 94 Summer Street
- First group of 29 children departed for Canada with John Middlemore on **1st May 1873**. All children were settled with families – elder children entered families as servants, younger children adopted by families with no children of their own. Formal agreements were signed to protect children from ill-usage.
- **A Reception and Distribution Home** was established at London, Ontario (**Guthrie House**)
- **By 1877, 310 children had been taken to Canada**
- **In 1898** – a new reception home was built at **Halifax (Fairview)**, Guthrie House no longer being in use. **From 1898 onwards children were placed in homes in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.**
- Children were employed to work on the farms or in a trade.
- **During World War One** the emigration of children to Canada by the Middlemore Homes ceased, but emigrations recommenced in May 1919 when a party of 90 children travelled to Canada
- **John Middlemore died in October 1924**, but the work of the charity continued. Mrs Paul Cadbury was chair of the first House Committee. In 1931 Paul Cadbury became chairman of the main committee of the Trust.
- **Children were visited regularly to check their happiness and situation** – visit reports can be found for some children amongst the records of the homes

Criteria for entering the Homes

- Disadvantaged poor children suffering from neglect and living in slum conditions taken into the homes – to be emigrated to Canada – to remove them from poor conditions in Birmingham to farms where it was felt that they could have healthy upbringing, a chance of a good life and receiving training in employment
- First annual report states 'Children are not taken to Canada because they are poor, but to save them from their bad companions, to whom, if they remained in Birmingham, they would always be tempted to return'.
- Parents of children sent to homes (if not orphaned children) were often considered unable or unfit to care for the children – the records illustrate cases where parent or guardian is drunk, violent or involved in crime.
- Children often placed in the homes by the **City Magistrates**.

- **The Bondfield Report of 1924 by a British Overseas Settlement Delegation concluded that** 'We are of the opinion that, on the whole, the present system works out satisfactorily, and that the prospects for the boys and girls in Canada are better than they would have been had they remained in the United Kingdom.' It states: 'We found that the children were, on the whole, well placed, and that they were treated with kindness and consideration. In

many cased the children were regarded as members of the family...in only a few instances did we come across evidence of unhappiness.’

- **Canadian Government introduced new legislation in 1924 to restrict immigration of young unaccompanied children to those over 14 years.** Between 1924 and 1926 only Middlemore children over 14 could be emigrated to Canada. Ultimately this restriction was lifted for the Middlemore Homes as effectively the children remained in the care of the society until age 21. However legislation passed in Nova Scotia meant no further Middlemore children were placed in the state.

1926 onwards – emigration to Australia through the Fairbridge Society of London

- Due to the difficulties in Canada, the Middlemore Homes began to emigrate some children to Australia through the Fairbridge Society - to Pinjarra in Western Australia, later to Molong and the Northcote Farm School in Victoria, also later to the Prince of Wales School in British Columbia.
- The Middlemore Homes and the Fairbridge Society began to work closely together
- In 1929 the homes moved from St. Luke’s Road to a new Middlemore Homes site in Selly Oak
- In 1938 a home for pre-school age children opened - ‘the Babies Home’ in Selly Oak – this was situated behind the main Middlemore Homes building.
- After the outbreak of World War Two in 1939 – the children in the home were evacuated to Wilderhope Manor in Shropshire. In Spring of 1940, school age children were brought back to Birmingham.
- In 1940, 50 children went to Australia and Canada
- In 1941, 23 children went to Canada

Total figures for child emigration by Middlemore Homes 1872 – 1945:

Received into the homes 7643

Emigrated to Canada or Australia 6067

The Children Act 1948 and the end of emigration

- In 1948 a report of the Care of Children Committee under Dame Myra Curtis recommended that child emigration should only continue if the receiving countries had adequate arrangements for inspection and supervision of the child migrants
- **The Children Act 1948** implemented the main recommendations of the report – it recommended boarding out before institutional care and approved emigration only in certain cases
- The Children Act placed care of children under the local authorities and so a very large number of children became the responsibility of the local government
- BCC approached Middlemore Homes in 1948 and asked the society to take a number of children into the homes, as the existing BCC cottage homes were already overcrowded

- **In 1949 – the last party of children left the Middlemore Homes to emigrate to Australia**
- **In 1949 – 15 children from Staffordshire Local Authority came to Middlemore.**
- **In December 1949 BCC agreed to lease the main Middlemore building for 3 years as a short term Children’s Home (NB. Was this Middlemore House?)**
- **For 5 years from 1949 the work of the Middlemore Homes was confined to the care of young children at Crowley House (the babies home).**

Crowley House

- **In 1869 Thomas Crowley founded a charity and on 25 March 1871 he opened ‘Crowley’s Orphanage for Poor Girls’ – to take girls born in wedlock who had lost both parents and to maintain and educate them to prepare them for domestic service**
- **During the Second World War the orphanage closed and in 1948 the endowment was transferred to the Middlemore Trustees. The work of Crowley’s charity was amalgamated with the Middlemore Homes**
- **In 1938 – a Babies Home at Selly Oak opened at the request of the Fairbridge Society to care for pre-school age children too young for emigration. This became known as Crowley House.**
- **For 5 years from 1949 the work of the Middlemore Homes was confined to the care of young children at Crowley House.**
- **In June 1955 – Crowley House became a Family Rehabilitation Centre – see below**

The Middlemore Trust 1954 onwards – caring for children within the family unit

- **From 1954 the Middlemore Trust began a shift in emphasis from caring for children with a view to emigration to caring for children within the family unit – ‘residential family rehabilitation’**
- **Main activity was to provide temporary residence for families where mothers were failing to cope at home or for mothers who had appeared before the Magistrates charged with child neglect and placed on probation**
- **Crowley House (previously the babies home) opened its doors for this purpose in June 1955 and in March 1956 it was authorised by the Home Office to take Probation cases.**
- **The lease of the main building to the City Council came to an end in 1954 and a further lease was negotiated to Cadbury Brothers Limited. In 1961 the building was sold to West Hill College of Education.**
- **Miss Priscilla Mounsey – the first warden of the unit at Crowley House was appointed on 1st September 1955. Miss Mounsey was a trained social worker**
- **Further accommodation at Lee Crescent (originally the Crowley Orphanage for Poor Girls) was established for whole family units – often in debt and unable to keep their home and maintain a functional family life. During the war years this building had been used by the City and**

converted into flats. Crowley House remained primarily for mothers and children with fathers staying for weekends and other short periods

- **By 1972** – 279 mothers and 858 children had been cared for at Crowley house
- **Work at Lee Crescent was carried out in close conjunction with the City Council** – the Housing Management Department of BCC recommended possible families and would later re-house the families
- **The Middlemore Centre Family Rehabilitation Unit in Speedwell Road, Hay Mills** opened in **1964** to replace the Lee Crescent accommodation
- **Flats on Moseley Street** were also converted from 1970 onwards to house 5 additional families, **aided by local authority funding**
- **Crowley house was sold in 1974 to the Home Office for similar work**
- **The Middlemore Centre at Hay Mills was demolished in 1978 and the work moved to Stilthouse Grove, Rednal**
- **During the 1980s, a Neighbourhood Centre was established in Rednal to provide welfare advice and other services to local families**
- **In February 1987, a Family Centre opened in Northfield .**