

Getting started with Reformatory and Industrial School records **By Lucie Wade, Leeds Beckett University**

Archival Records

What kind of records did schools leave behind, and how you might be able to use these in your own research? What you can find is entirely dependent on the school – some have left behind very complete records, some have left behind nothing at all. However, the records which do exist tend to be very detailed.

Admissions Records

These records were completed whenever a child was admitted to a school. From these records you can find out all sorts of information, including the child's name, height, weight, distinguishing marks, their character, previous convictions, their level of education, their religion – lots of information is usually given about the child's parents too, such as their jobs, where they lived, and their characters.

Discharge Records

If a school's discharge records have survived, you can, to a certain extent, track what happened to a child after they left. I mentioned at the beginning that schools were required to keep up with children for three years following their discharge, so these records will tell you where they went to live, their job, and how they were getting on in general.

Administrative Records

If the administrative records of the school survived, it's possible to get a glimpse into what kind of experience a child actually had within a reformatory or industrial school. Administrative records can include things such as school rules, dietary tables, timetables, and a programme of education. Records of managers' meetings can also help to determine this too, they usually mention any special events which took place to the school, or any changes to the normal school day and things like that. Furthermore, due to the voluntary nature of the schools, how they operated could vary greatly. I think this is great, because if you find an ancestor went to one of these schools, it means that the experience they had wasn't a standardised one, it was very particular to that school.

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However, it's worth mentioning that as these records deal with child penalty and contain sensitive information, archives are usually pretty strict about access. I would always recommend getting in touch with an archive prior to visiting and double checking what you are and aren't allowed to view. However, most records from the 1850s to the early twentieth century are now completely open to view, so there's plenty to go at!

Where do I start?

Here are some things to consider before getting started with your research. Most of the records for schools, if they survived, will be held in an archive local to that area. This is not the case for every single school, but this is where the records for these schools tend to be held. So if you think you had an ancestor in a particular school, then the best place to start would be in the archives local to the area that that school was in. Having said that, children could be (and were) sent to schools all over the country, not just the school closest to them. For example, if you are tracing a child who lived in Hull, it does not necessarily mean that they would be sent to a school in Hull. The National Archives provide detailed information about where archival records are held, so if you're looking for a particular school, you can search for it on their website, and if the records for that school survived it should tell you what archive they are currently held in and a bit of detail about the records. Lastly, the children's homes website, run by Peter Higginbotham, is an absolute mine of information in regards to all sorts of institutions which dealt with children. If it was a reformatory or an industrial school, it will be on that website, and he provides information about most of the schools on there, as well as further information about surviving records.

Useful Links

<http://www.childrenshomes.org.uk/>

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

<https://www.bl.uk/>

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk>

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By Lucie Wade, Leeds Beckett University

No. 2114

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Name Albert E Taylor

Age 16

Height 4'-6 1/2"

Hair Dark

Eyes Blue

Marks


Admitted 8 APR 1910

Where Born Loftus in Cleveland

Date of Birth Apr. 10 1894

Weight 5 st. 11 lb.

Figure Propo.



Offence Begging

Where and when committed Middlesbrough March 30 1910.

Before whom J. W. Fry Esq.

Sentence Until 19

Time expires Apr. 9. 1910

Previous Character Bad. Has been encouraged by his mother to go begging.

1st Conviction Feb. 8. 1909 Begging Probation order

2nd Conviction May 3 1909 do " " extended

3rd Conviction

4th Conviction

Schools attended

Read Imp. Write Imp. Cipher Std II General Intellig

Boy's Signature Albert Taylor

Where Employed

Religious Persuasion Church of England.

Parents Father Dalton Taylor Mother Emily Taylor

Occupation Iron stone mines


Where Employed Roseberry Mines Great Ayton.

Residence Father Gp W. A. Horsley High Street Great Ayton, York.

Character and Circumstances Father a steady and respectable man. Mother very careless. At present in Durham Prison serving 3 months for allowing this boy to beg. 5 young children dependent.

Relations and Friends Uncle Joseph Williams Loftus in Cleveland.

Sister Lily Taylor W. Flower 45 Cleveland St Clarence Hotel High Green Marake Shelton 7/1/13 Cleveland.



Here is an example of an admissions record. This is the record of Albert Taylor, who was admitted to the Leeds Reformatory School for Boys in 1910. Note how the record features two photographs – one taken on his admittance, and one when he was about to leave the school.

Image © Lucie Wade, record held by the West Yorkshire Archives.