British Home Children
Advocacy & Research Association
June 2020 Newsletter

By Lori Oschefski and Andrew Simpson

SPECIAL Feature

The British Workhouse

By Andrew Simpson

Walter Gibson Goulding - God's Given Gift

By Lori Oschefski, from her book "Bleating of the Lambs - Canada's British Home Children"

Born in 1908, Walter Goulding was Canada's oldest surviving British Home Child when he passed away, at one hundred and six years old, in August of 2014. He was the son of Walter Cam Goulding and his wife Kate Gibson and the sibling of Mary (Minnie), Cornelia, George, Edith and the youngest, Gertrude. Before the First World War, Walter, his five siblings and his parents lived together in Coventry, England. When the war broke out, even though Walter's mother Kate and his younger brother George were deathly ill, his father enlisted. This left the family to fend for themselves. Walter sat by George's bedside for four days until he died. His mother, who was dying of kidney disease, was taken to hospital. "I was not allowed to see her," Walter said. Walter's memory of these events was still crystal clear when he passed away at one hundred and six. After her death, the children were left on their own. Walter's father took a leave from service, desperately trying to find help for his children.

Shortly before their mother's death, in May of 1916, the children were admitted to Dr. Barnardo's Homes. Their group admission photo was taken and then in Walter's words "they took my sisters away and left me standing there all by myself, at eight years old". Walter would be forever separated from his sisters. The only one he saw again was the baby, Gertrude and in his words "it took me sixty years to find her".

The only evidence Walter had that they existed was a photograph that he treasured the rest of his life. Whenever he looked at it, it brought tears to his eyes. Once in Barnardo's, a foster home was quickly found for his sisters. Walter was stripped of everything that was dear to him, his friends, his home and most importantly, his family.

The children were supposed to be held by Barnardo's for the duration of the war only. For unknown reasons, their father never came to take them back.

Walter was asked at thirteen if he wanted to go to Canada or Australia to live. Walter was eager to leave Barnardo's as he did not like it there. He based his decision on how many days away they were by steamer.

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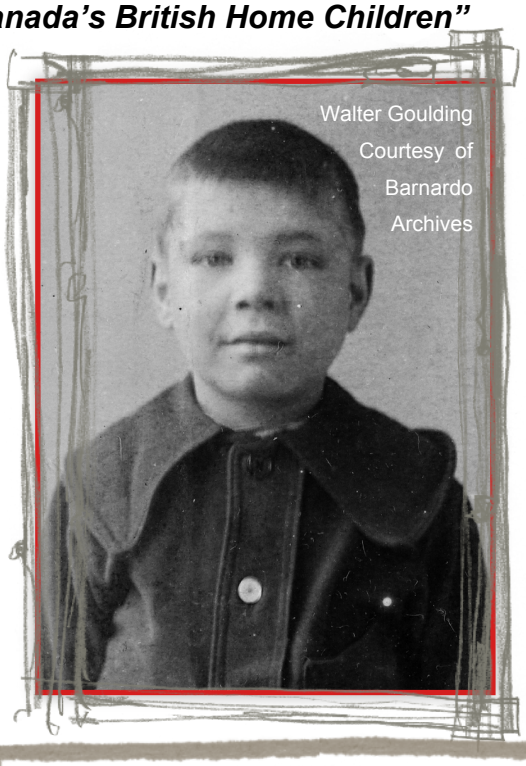


Walter Goulding
Courtesy of
Barnardo
Archives

Giving Back to our Community

During this trying time of the Pandemic, the BHCARA has given back to our community by gifting books to members who are isolating and suffering financial hardships.

6 "Beacon of Light" have been donated, 3 "The Forgotten Home Child" by Genevieve Graham, 2 "No Ocean too Wide" by Carrie Turansky, 2 Bleating of the Lambs by Lori Oschefski, and two "The Brightest of Dreams" by Susan Anne Mason.

Congratulations are in order for Genevieve Graham whose book remains #1 on the best sellers list in Canada - for the 11th week! She also spent 2 weeks as #2 on the list!

We are awaiting the sequel for Carrie Turansky's book "No Ocean Too Wide"!

Congratulations to all our Authors!

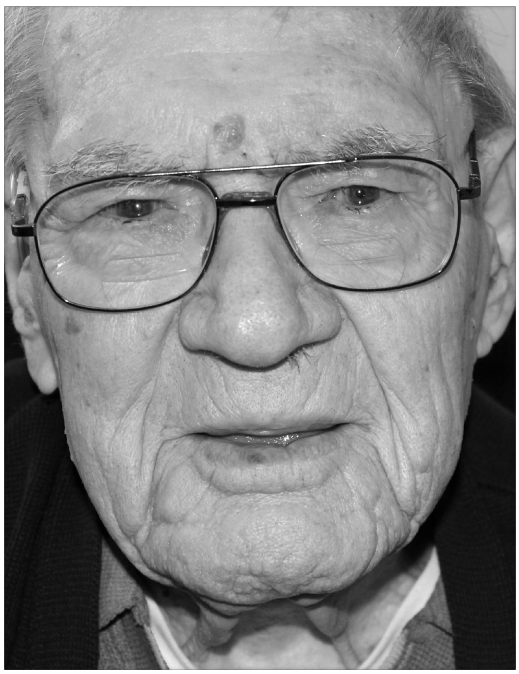
Canada was just over five days, Australia was five weeks. See nothing but water, he said and nothing else, it would just like being in a bird cage full of water. He chose Canada.

Landing in Canada on September 23, 1921 Walter remembers thinking "Lord God, where am I?" He had come from the city where there was thousands of people to the country side of Canada. He was sent out to the farm of Bert Blacklock of St. Paul's, near Stratford, Ontario. Walter was grateful that God gave him a good start, the Blacklock family was good to him and they "used" him well. He stayed with the Blacklock's for nine and a half years. "They got to be like my Canada home."

Walter never forgot his family back in England and he corresponded with his father often. His father remarried and had another son, George.

Walter eventually took job at a cheese factory in Ingersoll where he met his wife Rebecca (Ruby) McCutcheon. They were married on October 17, 1933 and had two son's , Terry and Robert. Many years later, Walter would tell Dinah Morrison, a volunteer worker at the nursing home where he and Ruby resided "You know something, I love Ruby more and more every day; she made me the happiest man in the whole world. I loved her when I put a wedding ring on her finger, and ever since she has been the love of my life." Ruby and Walter were married for over 70 years.

Portrait taken by Lori Oschefski, 2012
when Walter was only 104!



One day, in his late sixties, Walter was talking to his wife's cousin about what had happened to him as a child. She was able to trace not only his baby sister, who was living in Wiltshire, but a half-brother, George, from Walter's father's second marriage. They were reunited after sixty years. Sadly his other sisters had already passed on. At sixty seven, Walter made his first trip back to England since leaving there as a child. There he was reunited with his youngest sister Gertrude and met his half brother George.

Throughout Walter's life, he struggled with the stigma of being a Home Boy. I was honoured to have met Walter in person several times, and on one visit, taped an interview. This interview is a rare, first hand peek into the life of a British Home Child. In April of 2014 I was honoured to, once again, be in London to visit Walter. This was the occasion of his 106th birthday. The BHCARA put on a small party for him, complete with singing and a cake. We sat and chatted with Walter all afternoon. When the time came for us to leave, Walter told us how much he enjoyed the afternoon, saying that it was nice to know he had friends and that he would remember this for the rest of his life.

Walter passed away the following August. The moment I shared with Walter, which I will remember forever, came at the end of the taped interview. I had knelt down by his side, telling him of my family history. When I told him that my mother never told us about her connection, his demeanor quickly changed.

Walter started to cry, laying his head down on my shoulder and he sobbed out these words:

"When I hit one hundred and four, and you know those two sons never knew I was a Home Boy. I was ashamed to tell them. But when they found out, yeah I was ashamed to tell them. But they realized it now I told them the way my life had been and everything. I was ashamed to say I was an orphan boy from England. Oh yes, I get my moments when tears come you know. Well here I am, God's given gift and I don't want to forget that".

You can hear that clip on Youtube at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKFqfs__VKE&t=7s
His full interview from 2012 can be viewed at:
shorturl.at/hvUY7

Lori with Walter Goulding (his 106th Birthday) and George Beardshaw - above his Birthday cake from the BHCARA

Veterans Affairs Canada | Anciens Combattants Canada

Canada

Final stage of recognition: BHC are added to Veterans Affairs Canada web site

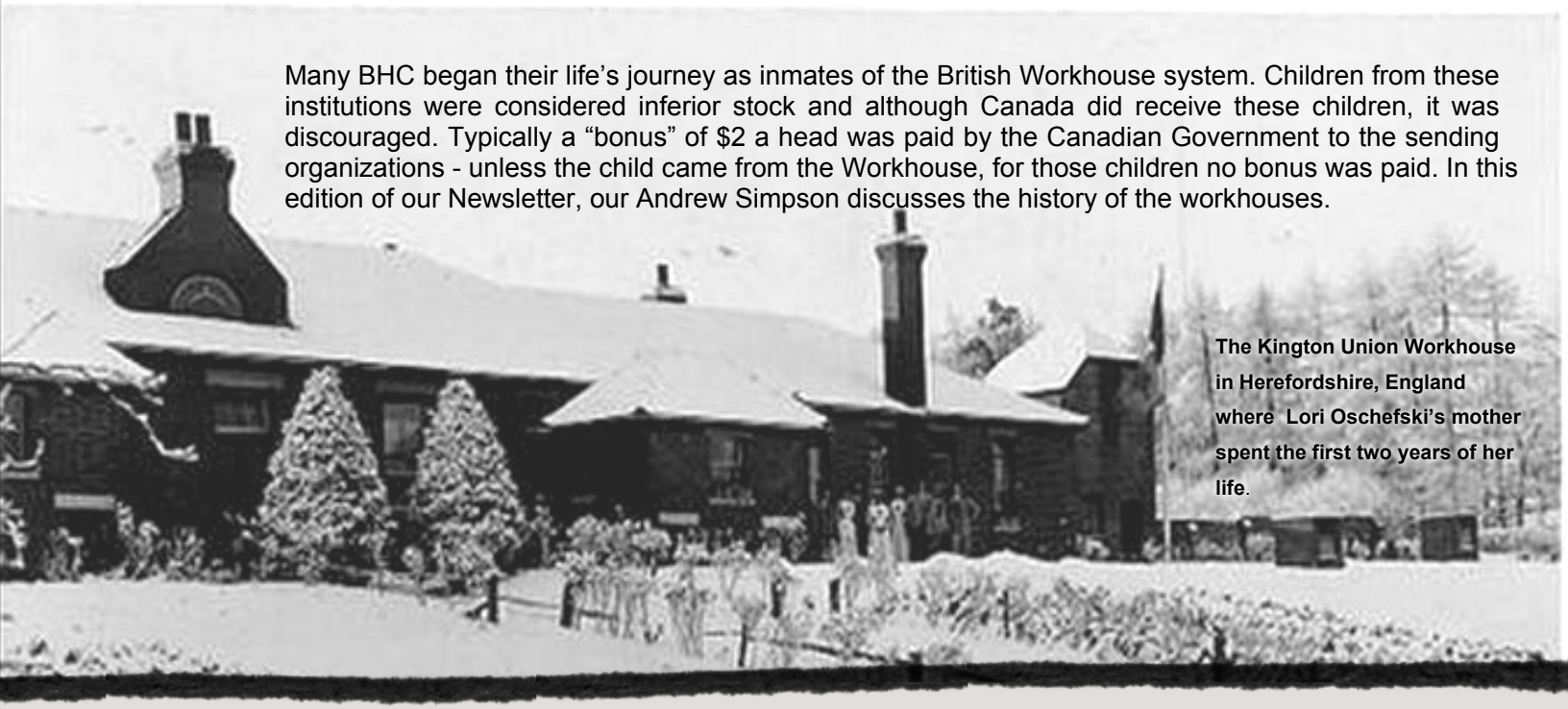
After 6 years of lobbying by the BHCARA (from April of 2014), recognition of the service of our BHC in the wars by Veterans Affairs Canada is now complete! VAC recently released their new page recognizing the service of the BHC in the Wars. Click on this link to view the page: https://bit.ly/2MAC4C5 .

The site also features the stories of four BHC who served, Claude Nunney, Walter Rayfield, Cyril Kinsella, Ronald Chamberlain and Victor Ford.

Our deepest thanks goes out to all those who worked so hard on our First World War project - it is because of all of you that we have been successful in this recognition. Without this work, this recognition would never have happened. Involved in this project (which stated in 2012) included Perry Snow, Marjorie P. Kohli, John Sayers , Jennifer Layne - Head Researcher of the First World War Project, Lori Oschefski, Carol Black, LeeAnn Beer, Dona Crawfordd, Dawn Heuston, Sharon Munro and various members of the BHCARA.

A special shout out of thanks to the Nantyr Shores Secondary School in Innisfil. Craig Froese, the Grade 10 History teacher has taken a keen interest in the service of our BHC and has incorporated their story into each year's lessons. Mr. Froese introduced MS. Oschefski to MP John Brassard who connected her with key people and also presented this in our House of Commons. https://bit.ly/2ANI33E

Many BHC began their life's journey as inmates of the British Workhouse system. Children from these institutions were considered inferior stock and although Canada did receive these children, it was discouraged. Typically a "bonus" of $2 a head was paid by the Canadian Government to the sending organizations - unless the child came from the Workhouse, for those children no bonus was paid. In this edition of our Newsletter, our Andrew Simpson discusses the history of the workhouses.



The Kington Union Workhouse in Herefordshire, England where Lori Oschefski's mother spent the first two years of her life.

The Workhouse System by Andrew Simpson

Anyone who spends even a short time with the history of Britain in the 19th century will sooner or later come across those hated "Poor Law Bastilles" which were the Workhouses created by the New Poor Law of 1834.

And having discovered them will in a very short time recoil with horror as did Charles Dickens who portrayed them in all their cruelty and indifference in his novel Oliver Twist, with its description *"of three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week on Sundays."*

Just how hated and feared they were amongst those who might be forced to rely on them permeates the period.

The second Chartist petition had included an attack on the Poor Law system and during the 1842 General Strike following Parliament's rejection of that petition, the Stockport Workhouse was attacked.

And that level of fear persisted into the 20th century with some older working people shuddering at the thought of the workhouse despite the fact that Workhouses had been abolished in 1930.

To which can be added the shock that many of us have felt when we have come up against family members who were either born in the Workhouse or spent some time in one.

Mine did, and it was one of these who was migrated to Canada by Middlemore on behalf of the Derby Union back in 1914.

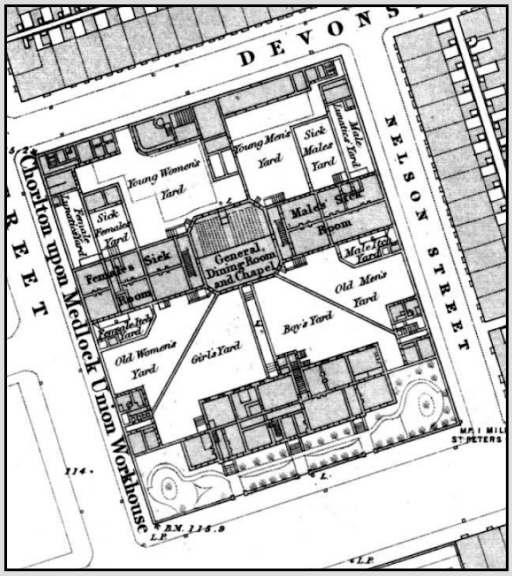
So on this bright May day, with the promise of good weather to come I have decided to plunge in to the grim world of the Workhouse with all its accompanying tales of cruelty, indifference and wasted lives, and examine an institution predicated on the idea that poverty was the result of fecklessne ss, and idleness, and therefore those who were poor only had themselves to blame.

But for those unfamiliar with Workhouses, they were buildings constructed to receive anyone seeking help because they were sick, destitute, unemployed, or just too old to work.

Under the 1834 Poor Law, the way relief was administered to the poor was reorganized, replacing an older system of assistance for the poor, the sick and unemployed with one based on the principle of less eligibility, which sought to make the conditions for accepting help worse than conditions outside, thereby acting as a deterrent to all but the most desperate.

This translated into the creation of a harsh and unrelenting system of tedious work, basic meals and accommodation alongside petty regulations. …..continued

There had been Workhouses before 1834, and some of these already modeled themselves on that policy of less eligibility but what was new was the efficient and uniform method of organnszation, which divided the country into Poor Law Unions, each with a central Workhouse, many of which were newly constructed. The Unions were run by an elected group of Guardians and each reported back to the Poor Law Commissioners who produced annual reports.



Chorlton Union Workhouse, 1842

Over the course of the next century improvements were made, including the provision of hospitals, but the Workhouse remained the workhouse, with all its stigma and institutionalized petty routines and regulations.

The Chorlton Union was typical. It covered a swathe of land to the south of Manchester with a combined population of 74,300 in 1834 rising steadily to 76,924 in 1841 and 123,841 by 1851.

The northern end encompassed Chorlton-on Medlock which was industrial and residential, while the rest of the Union consisted of small rural villages and hamlets.

It's first purpose built Workhouse was situated in Chorlton-on Medlock but when this proved too small a new one was erected south of Chorlton-on Medlock in what was still open countryside.
For both sick and healthy inmates, the regime inside the institution was bleak and austere. The segregation of the sexes extended from the young to the old and from the sick to those judged to be lunatics. In all there were twelve exercise yards for the 300 inmates each dedicated to a particular group where behind tall walls no man or boy could gaze on the opposite sex.

The policy of segregation was particularly hard on elderly married couples who may have spent their entire adult life together but were now forced apart. Of the 17 couples in the work house in the summer of 1841 most were in their sixties. But it was no less hard on those with young families seeking help. They too were split up. Boys were accommodated next to the old men and girls beside the old woman while the younger men and women were housed beyond the infirmary at the back of the workhouse.

Twenty-four children in our workhouse had been admitted with their mothers. These mothers were mostly in their thirties or forties, were there without their husband or partner and most had entered with two or more children and as we shall see they would be separated from the children they had brought into this world.

What constituted a child had been set down in the original classification back in 1834. This specified that females under 16 were girls, while males below the age of 13 were treated as boys, and those under seven were regarded as a separate class. In certain circumstances a child under seven could be left with their mother and even share her bed. Other than that, mothers were supposed to have access to the child. This was easier if the child were in the same workhouse and only a possibility if it were in a different institution. As to the length of the interview this depended on the Guardians.

In the Chorlton Union Workhouse there were 66 under the age of 16 of which a full 42 were there on their own. Their ages ranged from just a few days through to 15. Some were there with siblings, but most had no one except the friends they could make.

They would have arrived in many different ways. Some would be orphans, or deserted children, while others might be illegitimate and yet others abandoned due to a range of disabilities. During the period 1831 to 1835 8,650 children were picked up off Manchester streets and deemed to have been deserted, while in Salford in 1835

of the 471 children recorded as lost only 138 were found.

Once inside the Guardians might decide to retain an orphan under the age of sixteen if they determined that on release the child was in danger.

Well might these children have abandoned all hope for in a real sense they were lost to all but the officials of the institution and even those charged with their welfare may not always have been diligent in promoting their needs.

So it was with young Mary "Penny" in November 1841, who had been abducted from a nurse girl in Hulme, left with another child a few streets away for a penny and ended in the workhouse on Stretford New Road as an orphan where she languished for eleven months. The admission book showed no record of the baby's entry into the workhouse and the official position was that such events were improbable. This may well have sealed her fate, but for the persistence of her parents combined with the testimony of an inmate which resulted in the baby's release. It is a bizarre and unusual story but one which points up more than a hint of what could happen to those with no voice or influence.

The largest group were the old. After a lifetime of hard work, struggling with low wages punctuated by periods of unemployment and ill health, many were forced into the workhouse as a last resort. So it was for Ellen Warburton who in April of 1861 was 98 years old and seeking assistance inside the walls of the workhouse.

Her story may be typical. She was born in Chorlton-cum-Hardy in 1776 and retained her independence well into her 60s, running a home which she shared with her teenage grandson. By 1851 the situation had changed, and Ellen aged 75 was living in the home of her now married grandson. A decade later the family had moved to Manchester and Ellen was in the workhouse. She was by now a very old woman, and the new home in John Street, Chorlton-on Medlock was a one up one down terraced house inside the loop of the River Medlock, hemmed in on all sides by chemical works, timber yards, and a brewery. And the lack of space may have determined her move to the Workhouse.

But it is only when we peel back the figures and begin to follow the Guardian's own policy of segregating the inmates by gender that the full picture of who carried the biggest burden emerges. In the summer of 1841 the single largest group were adult women who as we have seen often entered the workhouse with children.

But throughout the 19th century some at least regarded the Workhouse as one of the strategies that might have to be employed to cope with a crisis and not the favoured choice. Conditions could be Spartan at best and usually harsh. But many used it as a short term solution. Later in the century Flora Thompson wrote of one woman who took herself and children into the local workhouse for a month when her husband was sentenced to prison for wife beating. Others might be admitted when ill or pregnant or when there was no other source of support.

Chorlton Union Offices 2020

How easy it was for any one of this group to descend from gainful employment to pauper was evidenced by Elizabeth Pearson. She was born in one of the townships at the southern end of the Union in 1822 and her early years had been spent with her parents in Chorlton-cum-Hardy. She was a domestic servant who fell pregnant and gave birth as an unmarried mother in 1855, which in turn led to her admission to the Workhouse.

Those asking for relief expected to be set to work. The images of inmates crushing stones or unpicking oakum are a vivid reminder of the principle that poor law relief came at a price. But some of The Unions explored alternatives particularly for able bodied men. In the early years of the new Poor Law, schemes had been put in place to encourage the migration of rural workers to the industrial centres of the north, but these foundered during trade recessions, and later still programmes were introduced to migrate

able bodied men to Canada.

The literature on the early Poor Law Unions is extensive, and one source which is particularly useful is the annual reports of the Poor Law Commissioners, which are available on Google.

As for the records of the individual Workhouses, these can be fragmenatry. Those for my own BHC are limited, while in the case of the Manchester Union which was north of the Chorlton Union, some can be accessed at Manchester Central Reference Library, or on FindMyPast.

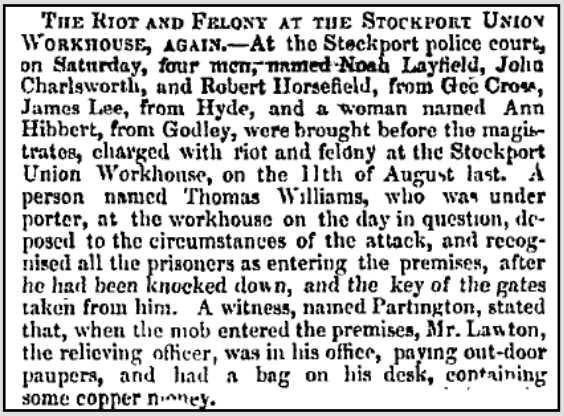
And given that simple fact that the Workhouses were abolished in the 1930s, accounts of what they were like will soon vanish from living memory, leaving just the buildings. But time here has not always been kind to these.

Some morphed into hospitals, but by the 21st century they were no longer fit for purpose, and have been demolished. A few linger on as conversions to residential use, while some have become museums, leaving others as empty and neglected shells waiting for something to happen.

Photo Credits:
Chorlton Union Workhouse, 1842, The Workhouse in Hulme from the OS 1842-44, courtesy of Digital Archives Association, http://digitalarchives.co.uk/,

Chorlton Union Offices 2020, from the collection of Andrew Simpson

Stockport Union Workhouse 2020, from the collection of Andy Robertson



THE RIOT AND FELONY AT THE STOCKPORT UNION WORKHOUSE, AGAIN.—At the Stockport police court, on Saturday, four men, named Noah Layfield, John Charlsworth, and Robert Horsefield, from Gee Cross, James Lee, from Hyde, and a woman named Ann Hibbert, from Godley, were brought before the magistrates, charged with riot and felony at the Stockport Union Workhouse, on the 11th of August last. A person named Thomas Williams, who was under porter, at the workhouse on the day in question, deposed to the circumstances of the attack, and recognised all the prisoners as entering the premises, after he had been knocked down, and the key of the gates taken from him. A witness, named Partington, stated that, when the mob entered the premises, Mr. Lawton, the relieving officer, was in his office, paying out-door paupers, and had a bag on his desk, containing some copper money.

The Riot and Felony at the Stockport Workhouse September 28, 1842

Stockport Union Workhouse 2020

In 2011, Lori Oschefski visited the site of the Kington Union Workhouse to find the building had been recently torn down - replaced by these stark,cold looking town-homes. They are a stark contrast to the road upon which they are located.

Andrew Simpson is an Author, historian and researcher. Among his accomplishments, is his newly released book "The Ever Open Door - 150 Years of the Together Trust". This book gives an excellent insight into the Together Trust, who sent children to Canada as part of the BHC programs.

Visit his blog at: https://chorltonhistory.blogspot.com/