

**‘A permanent environment of brightness, warmth, and “homeliness”’:
domesticity and authority in a Victorian children’s institution¹**

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Abstract

Nineteenth-century children’s welfare institutions have rarely been understood as functioning as a home - we know little about the role that domesticity played in the everyday lives of child inmates and how it could shape inmates’ sense of being at home. This essay uses The Waifs and Strays Society, a charitable children’s institution, founded in 1881, as a case study to examine how ideas of home and ‘homeliness’ featured in institutions for poor children. The essay builds on material culture approaches to highlight the relationship between institutional authority practices in relation to home life, and to better understand the role of the material world as a controlling force within the institution. The article challenges the pervasiveness of conclusions that children’s welfare institutions were little concerned with providing a homely environment for inmates, and offers new understandings of a different strand of welfare provision for children that held particular cultural and ideological meaning, beyond aspects of institutional discipline and reform.

Keywords

Homeliness, domesticity, material culture, child welfare, institutions, pets, authority

In 1908, The Waifs and Strays Society – a charitable children’s welfare institution – published an article in its monthly magazine that reminded readers of its mission to create a ‘permanent environment of brightness, warmth, and “homeliness”’ for children residing within the institution.³ The statement suggested that the institution should evoke a feeling of comfort and cheer for inhabitants, and was not unique in articulating the Society’s aim to create a sense of ‘home’ for children in its care. The idea of home appeared to be central to the care provided by the institution, and the subjects of home life, domesticity, material space and ‘homeliness’ appeared

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³ ‘The Home Beautiful’, *Our Waifs and Strays* (February, 1908), p. 274.

frequently in the Society's monthly magazine for its supporters and other institutional literature. The Waifs and Strays Society also emphasised what their homes were not: their efforts to create beauty within the institution were presented as a stark contrast to other institutions, such as the workhouse, which was characterised by 'the lifelessness of the place, the monotony, the practical imprisonment...the absence of natural pleasures and human interests'.⁴ But what then, was this notion of 'homeliness', and how was it translated into the material substance of the Society's homes? Why did creating a sense of home in the institution matter? How could these spaces and material objects within them influence inmates' movement and behaviour? This article seeks to address questions such as these by examining how The Waifs and Strays' institutional spaces were designed to function as a homely site for child inmates.

During the nineteenth century, an increasingly developed system of welfare provision resulted in a growing number of individuals, with varying needs and circumstances, living in state and voluntary residential institutions. Prisons, asylums, specialist hospitals for a variety of illnesses, disabilities, and behaviours, workhouses, and reformatories were set up to manage, control and rectify a number of perceived issues. Many of these institutions were driven by humanitarian concerns to relieve suffering and illness for vulnerable groups, whilst others were more custodial in nature - designed to segregate 'problematic' populations from the rest of society and to provide treatment and management that aimed to correct behaviour.⁵

There was a growth in the specialist provision of welfare for children during this period too, influenced by contemporary debates that acknowledged that children needed specific, distinct care compared to adult inmate populations. As such, the term children's institution covers a whole range of different types of residential homes and care settings. Workhouses established under the New Poor Law legislation in 1834,

⁴ 'A Comparison', *Our Waifs and Strays* (June, 1891), pp. 4-5.

⁵ See Jane Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution: Material Life in Asylums, Lodging Houses and Schools in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Felix Driver, *Power and Pauperism: The Workhouse System, 1834-1884* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); David Wright, *Mental Disability in Victorian England: The Earlswood Asylum, 1847-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Teresa Ploszajska, 'Moral Landscapes and Manipulated Spaces: Gender, Class and Space in Victorian Reformatory Schools', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 20 (1994), 413-429.

which had initially managed the whole pauper population in one site, began to care for certain types of individuals, including pauper children in separate, specialist wards.⁶ Industrial and reformatory schools, established in the 1850s, aimed to manage destitute and criminal youths,⁷ while children suffering from mental illness or disabilities were increasingly catered for in asylums, where they could receive specialist treatment and holistic care.⁸ Religious benevolence and charitable activity further led to an expansion of orphanages to manage the ever-growing population of children without relatives.

The Waifs and Strays Society (WSS), and other charities such as Barnardo's and National Children's Homes, delivered care to children facing a range of different issues, and provided an alternative to state workhouse provision. Many children entered these institutions because of the destitution and extreme poverty that their families faced: for some parents, placing a child in an institution such as The Waifs and Strays Society, enabled the family to remain largely intact and improve their economic circumstances. Given the varying needs of these child inmates, these institutions increasingly developed their own specialist provision for this group, including homes for sick and disabled children, and industrial or specialist training homes.

It is within this context of increasing and specialist childcare provision that The Waifs and Strays Society was established in 1881 by Edward de Montjoie Rudolf, a Sunday School teacher working in Lambeth. The Society opened its first home in Clapton in 1882 to provide for the many outcast, destitute, and friendless children in London. Like many other charities, the WSS was driven by an evangelical mission to 'rescue' children from situations of perceived danger and vulnerability, and as such, their operations extended to the removal of children from circumstances thought to expose them to moral corruption, abuse, neglect and cruelty. Admission records demonstrate that familial poverty, a result of low earnings, seasonal and casual employment, or the impact of familial ill health, was a key factor for children's admission. In many cases,

⁶ Driver, *Power and Pauperism*, pp. 95-112.

⁷ Heather Shore, *Artful Dodgers: Youth and Crime in Early Nineteenth-Century London* (London: Boydell Press, 1999); Linda Mahood, *Policing Gender, Class and Family in Britain, 1850-1940* (London: UCL Press, 1995); Ploszajska, 'Moral Landscapes and Manipulated Spaces'.

⁸ Wright, *Mental Disability in Victorian England*.

families intended for children to stay in the institution temporarily, rather than permanently: many parents requested that children be returned to them once their circumstances had improved. Surviving sources show that some children did return to their family and friends, if institutional staff considered this in their best interests. This practice was unusual: other studies of similar institutions have demonstrated just how difficult it was for parents to remove their children from residential homes or even keep in touch - from an institutional point of view, admission was intended to be permanent, until the child was old enough to earn an independent living.⁹

The organisation grew rapidly in size as a result of the goodwill and patronage of its many Anglican supporters. The Society set up homes in each diocese, and as such, sought to secure the support of members of local Church of England congregations in each area. By 1908, the Society had successfully established 108 homes, in which they cared for approximately 4,000 children per year. The Society was a fierce competitor to Barnardo's children's homes, and equally innovative in securing support and scaling up its charitable work: by 1918, the Society had cared for approximately 22,500 children since opening its first home.

Despite the existence of many and varied types of institutions that sought to care for poor and vulnerable children in the nineteenth century, these institutions have rarely been viewed or understood as functioning as a home. Instead, the Dickensian representation of the Poor Law institution as an oppressive, miserable and harsh establishment, where inmates received meagre material assistance and were cruelly treated, has shaped popular imaginings of Victorian welfare institutions for children. Recent scholarship has begun to challenge this view, however, by examining how the material world of residential institutions, such as asylums, schools and lodging houses, were shaped by domestic ideals and set against notions of the imagined and ideal home.¹⁰

⁹ Susan Ash, *Funding Philanthropy: Dr Barnardo's Metaphors, Narratives and Spectacles* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), p. 38; Ginger Frost, 'Under the Guardians' Supervision: Illegitimacy, Family, and the English Poor Law, 1870-1930', *Journal of Family History*, 38 (2013), 134-135; Lydia Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, and Contested Citizenship in London* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2006), pp. 95-119; Lynn Abrams, *The Orphan Country* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1998), p. 90.

¹⁰ Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution; Residential Institutions in Britain, 1725-1970*, ed. by Jane Hamlett, Lesley Hoskins and Rebecca Preston (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013).

Yet aside from public schools, children's institutions have been largely omitted from such studies, and discussions of domesticity in these spaces – if they feature at all – are often incidental to broader examinations of children's welfare, reform and training.¹¹ Lydia Murdoch's research on Barnardo's is an exception to this, and provides a valuable study that charts the shifting environment of children's institutions from barrack schools to family cottages.¹² As Murdoch highlights, the middle-class ideals of domesticity and domestic space underpinning the family cottage model functioned as a means to incorporate poor children into the English social hierarchy by teaching them the values of productive citizenship and labour. However, other studies have drawn attention to the failure of these institutions to facilitate adequate social and emotional care for inmates, consequently concluding that there was nothing 'homely' about the children's institution.¹³ Thus, the dominant model of children's welfare institutions remains one of barren, regimented and uniform space and experience. We know little about the important role that domesticity played in the everyday lives of child inmates in the welfare institution, and how it could shape a sense of 'home' for residents.

As an ideological concept, the home has been the subject of renewed scholarly interest over the last decade. Interdisciplinary approaches to studies of the home have focussed attention on the physical and material aspects of the site as a means to understand inhabitants' cultural and social ideals and their experiences. Research has tended to focus on middle-class domesticity,¹⁴ although the home-life of poorer classes in the nineteenth century has more recently become a subject worthy of re-

¹¹ For discussions on public schools, see Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution*, pp. 62-110.

¹² Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans*, pp. 43-67.

¹³ See Abrams, *The Orphan Country*, pp. 59, 105-117, 170-177; Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel, *Child, Nation, Race, and Empire*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 16-40, 159-194; Frost, 'Under the Guardians' Supervision', 123. An exception here is Mary Clare Martin's research, which suggests that residents in a home for 'mentally defective' individuals in Glasgow had some positive experiences of institutional care. See Mary Clare Martin, 'Refuge or prison? Girls' experiences of a home for the "mentally defective" in Scotland, 1906-1948', in *Residential Institutions in Britain*, ed. by Hamlett, Hoskins and Preston, pp. 65-77.

¹⁴ See Jane Hamlett, *Material Relations: Domestic Interiors and Middle-Class Families in England, 1850-1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010); *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800*, ed. by Ben Griffin, Lucy Delap and Abigail Wills (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

evaluation.¹⁵ Other research has examined the home as an idea or illusion, or an important imagined location.¹⁶ Scholarship has also begun to consider the ways in which inhabitants of temporary and permanent residences beyond the family unit could imagine such space as ‘home’.¹⁷

That historians have given little attention to questions of domesticity and ‘home’ within children’s institutions is surprising.¹⁸ First, the growing aesthetic movement, shifting attitudes towards the ‘house beautiful’, and a growing culture of domestic virtue driven by a rise in evangelicalism, all gave new meaning and status to the home and influenced patterns of middle-class homemaking.¹⁹ The increasing affluence of the middle classes too, meant that a new pride was taken in displaying material items that transmitted inhabitants’ identity and moral character. The prolific publication of advice manuals during the second half of the nineteenth century reflected this growing focus on how to tastefully decorate the middle-class home in the most fashionable and meaningful way.²⁰ The relationship between morality and the domestic material world, however, was not exclusive to the middle-class home: objects played a role in forming the identities and reflecting the social ambitions of their owners in the homes of the working classes too.²¹ Additionally, and as this essay will proceed to show, a range of ‘homely’ ideals were translated into other residential settings, including the welfare institution.

¹⁵ Julie-Marie Strange, ‘Fatherhood, Furniture, and the Interpersonal Dynamics of Working-Class Homes, c. 1870-1914’, *Urban History*, 40 (2013), 271-286; Megan Doolittle ‘Time, Space and Memories: The Father’s Chair and Grandfather Clocks in Victorian Working-Class Domestic Lives’, *Home Cultures*, 8 (2011), 245-264; Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London, 1870-1914* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996).

¹⁶ Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, *Home* (London: Routledge, 2006); *Ideal Homes? Social Change and Domestic Life*, ed. by Tony Chapman and Jenny Hockey (London: Routledge, 1999).

¹⁷ Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution; Residential Institutions in Britain*, ed. by Hamlett, Hoskins and Preston; Mary Guyatt, ‘A semblance of home: mental asylum interiors, 1880-1914’ in *Interior Design and Identity*, ed. by Susan McKellar and Penny Sparke (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 72-92.

¹⁸ Domesticity here covers all aspects related to home and home life, including the material culture, everyday practices, and relationships enacted in and associated with the home.

¹⁹ Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution*, p. 5; Margaret Ponsonby, *Stories from Home: English Domestic Interiors, 1750-1850* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*; Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

²⁰ See Hamlett, *Material Relations*, pp. 29-73; Robert W. Edis, *Decoration and Furniture of Town Houses*, (London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1881).

²¹ Julie-Marie Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class, 1865-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 82-85; Alastair Owens, Nigel Jeffries, Karen Wehner and Rupert Featherby, ‘Fragments of the Modern City: Material Culture and the Rhythms of Everyday Life in Victorian London’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 15 (2010), 212-225.

Secondly, the rhetoric of ‘home’ permeated social reformers’ debates about institutional childcare and their critiques of the ‘wretched’ working-class homes from which children arrived. The institutional environment too could be dangerous: overcrowding, unhealthy environments, moral corruption, lack of individual care, and the effects of institutionalism were noted to hinder some children’s progress later in life.²² Welfare reformers increasingly acknowledged that a sense of homeliness and affective family life was needed to support children’s social and emotional development. Reformers such as Mary Carpenter, Louisa Twining, Florence Hill and Jane Senior promoted smaller cottage homes and boarding-out as preferential models by which to achieve this aim during the later decades of the century.²³ These less-institutionalised living environments sought to imitate homely ideals, where matrons and masters became ‘parent’ figures to inmates, and specific sets of domestic ideals were manifest in interior decoration, routines and movement within the spaces.

This essay examines the ways in which the spatial arrangement and material culture – that is, the material objects and the meanings and significance assigned to them by contemporaries – helped to create a sense of home for inmates. In doing so it takes a different approach to Murdoch’s work which focused on how institutional space helped to fashion new identities and ideals of citizenship for child inmates.²⁴ The essay takes forward some of the issues raised in Jane Hamlett’s recent work on institutional material culture, which demonstrated the importance of home across several different institutions, to highlight how ideas of home feature in institutions for poor children.²⁵ In particular, this essay builds on this material culture approach to highlight the relationship between institutional authority practices in relation to home

²² Jane Senior, ‘Report on Education of Girls in Pauper Schools’ in House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, *Third Annual Report of the Local Government Board, 1874*, (C.1071)(XXV.1), pp. 311-395.

²³ Stephen Soanes, ‘“The Place was a Home from Home”: Identity and Belonging in the English Cottage Home for Convalescing Psychiatric Patients, 1910–1939’, in *Residential Institutions*, ed. by Hamlett, Hoskins and Preston, pp. 109-124; Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans*, p. 61; Felix Driver, ‘Discipline without Frontiers? Representations of the Mettray Reformatory Colony in Britain, 1840-1880’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 3 (1990), 272-293.

²⁴ Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans*, pp. 43-67.

²⁵ Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution*. For literature on material culture and its use as a methodological approach, see *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn*, ed. by Patrick Joyce and Tony Bennett (London: Routledge, 2010); Frank Trentmann, ‘Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics’, *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009), 283-307; Daniel Miller, *The Comfort of Things* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008); Daniel Miller, *Material Culture: Why Some Things Matter* (London: UCL Press, 1998).

life, which is an area that has not yet been explored. The recent rise of material culture approaches in historical studies has offered new insight into thinking about the materiality of the past, the physicality and movements of everyday life, and how people used, experienced and valued various objects. Like Hamlett's recent work, this essay looks at the material world of the institution to better understand its role as a controlling force within the institution, by examining issues of authority, boundaries, comfort and nurture. In doing so, the essay offers new understandings of a different strand of welfare provision for children that held particular cultural and ideological meaning, beyond aspects of institutional discipline and reform, and provides further insight into the variety of ways that domesticity could operate within a broader institutional context.

This essay uses The Waifs and Strays Society (WSS) as a case study to focus on the children's institution, and to contribute new understandings to growing scholarship about how institutional spaces could function as a home for varied inmates and patients.²⁶ Despite being one of the largest children's institutions operating at the end of the nineteenth century, few historians have focused on its history.²⁷ By using a single institution as a case study to take a 'microhistory' approach to the study of children's residential care, the essay seeks to throw new light on the bigger picture of welfare provision, to add diversity to and sharpen the picture of children's care within this wider welfare context. The essay draws on interdisciplinary approaches to material culture to examine how a notion of homeliness underpinned the childcare ideologies and practices of a non-state welfare institution. Analysis of WSS literature and photographic collections highlights how the Society envisioned their institutional homes, how homely ideals were reproduced in practice, and how space and material objects were used to influence inmates' movements and experiences.

I. Material provision in The Waifs and Strays Society homes

²⁶ See especially, Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution; Residential Institutions in Britain*, ed. by Hamlett, Hoskins and Preston; Guyatt, 'A Semblance of Home', pp. 72-92.

²⁷ The exception here is Ginger Frost's work, which has used WSS source material in her work on Victorian childhood and illegitimacy. See Ginger Frost, *Victorian Childhoods* (London: Praeger, 2009); Ginger Frost: *Illegitimacy in English Law and Society, 1860-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

The Society's notion of 'home' was shaped by contemporary ideologies governing the domestic architecture and interiors of middle-class homes. By the late nineteenth century, a wealth of didactic literature promoted the well-ordered and fashionable home as a private haven separate from the public world of labour among the Victorian middle classes.²⁸ Robert Edis' 1881 advice manual about furnishing, for example, reflects contemporary attitudes towards the material culture and decoration of the middle-class home. Edis highlights growing concerns about the importance of careful decoration and educative power of material culture within spaces inhabited by children, such as the nursery.²⁹ Although such advice targeted the middle-class home, the influence of attitudes about the moral power of home decoration can be seen beyond this setting, and in the institutional home. In order to create a sense of 'homeliness' in the institutional setting, the Society's residential spaces borrowed components from the middle-class domestic ideals of comfort, beauty, authority, privacy, responsibility and division. For the WSS, these facets helped to create an ideal site that embodied and inculcated the Victorian values of morality, industry, authority, and autonomy that were deemed especially significant to working-class children's development and training. Implicit in this notion of 'homeliness' too, was the idea that the institutional space had a psychological role in helping inmates feel at ease and a sense of belonging. This could offer support to help them overcome the estrangement from the familiar environments of the family home and the psychological unease of being parted from relatives, even though the institutional home most likely bore little relation to the working-class homes from which they had come.

The WSS emphasised permanency, beauty and comfort as the primary elements by which to create an instinctive sense of homeliness for children under its care, as the quotation at the start of the essay shows. Permanency was also central to their mission to rescue children from undesirable and immoral environments, and established through a range of application forms and contracts. Although relatives

²⁸ See for example, *Hearth and Home* (London), May 1891-December 1900. See also, Cohen, *Household Gods*, pp. 1-32; Moira Donald, 'Tranquil Havens? Critiquing the Idea of Home as the Middle-Class Sanctuary', in *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior*, ed. by Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 103-120.

²⁹ Edis, *Decoration and Furniture of Town Houses*, pp. 226-227.

were not required to fully relinquish parental rights, they were deterred from reclaiming children by the Society's demand for reimbursement of childcare costs. While this may have achieved some success as the Society stated in 1904, that on average, children spent over four years in their care,³⁰ and in practice, many relatives applied to the Society for the return of their children.³¹

Upon admission, children were placed in WSS homes located across the country, with the intention that this would become their permanent home. However, placement patterns suggest that permanency was often difficult to achieve, and inmates could experience a minimum of three institutional homes depending on their age. The Society boarded infants out with families, so that they could benefit from affective family life, before being transferred to residential homes between the ages of about eight to ten. Here, institutional life was more regimented, structured around education and training. Many children over the age of twelve were sent to the Society's larger training homes, from which they entered employment. For girls this was usually domestic service, while boys were apprenticed in trades such as boot making, tailoring, or placed in farm work.

Although transferral to different homes sought to meet the age-related and training needs of inmates, it could also disrupt their sense of home and belonging. Correspondence suggests that foster families were often reluctant to give up the children they had cared for, for many years, and some foster-parents applied to the Society to 'adopt' them rather than part with them. Meanwhile, other correspondence indicates that even when children did leave their foster families, they managed to remain in touch and maintain affective relationships through letter writing and visits. Longevity within a single institutional home could also be negated by transferring or discharging children that the Society perceived to be 'troublesome', which disrupted inmates' sense of permanency and belonging. Despite efforts to provide children with a permanent home, in practice, home sites were unstable and transient in their physicality, location, and in the composition of the institutional family unit.

³⁰ The Waifs and Strays Society, *Handbook for Workers Part III*, (1904), p. 26.

³¹ For a detailed discussion of relatives' requests for children's return, see Claudia Soares, 'Neither Waif nor Stray: Home, Family and Belonging in the Victorian Children's Institution', *Unpublished PhD*, (The University of Manchester, 2015).

Domestic architecture and spatial layout reflected the Society's attempts to create a sense of homeliness. Several historians have drawn attention to reformers' preferences for family-based, smaller 'cottage' homes rather than larger punitive institutions.³² Contemporary critiques of other types of treatment and therapy in institutions such as psychiatric asylums, convalescent homes, and workhouse infirmaries, also contributed to the design and structure of smaller institutional homes, where daily life was based on reformatory rather than punitive measures.³³ Influenced by similar critiques of children's institutional care,³⁴ the WSS favoured this trend of childcare provision in smaller environments to better facilitate physical, social and moral development. The Society proclaimed their commitment to the cottage home model, stating that it was 'infinitely better to care for children under natural conditions' in order to 'develop home instincts', rather than to 'mass children in huge Poor-Law or other institutions'.³⁵ Indeed, elements such as comfort, beauty and permanence may have mattered more to the WSS than other institutions, given that the goal of many institutions that cared for both children and adults, was to simply reform and discharge. As such, inmates' permanency and comfort may well have been of little importance to officials. Nevertheless, historians have shown that comfort did matter in other institutions: the ability to individualise space, appearance, or possess personal objects were thought to provide curative benefits to inmates, particularly for those who were confined in the long term.³⁶

As such, size became a central feature in solidifying the idea of homeliness in spatial and architectural form, which helped residents cultivate affective bonds in the home, and receive individual support and attention from staff. Whilst other cottage homes, such as Barnardo's, usually housed between twenty and forty children, WSS

³² Paula Bartley, *Prostitution, Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 26; Soanes, "The Place was a Home from Home", in *Residential Institutions*, ed. by Hamlett, Hoskins and Preston, pp. 109-124; Lydia Murdoch 'From Barrack Schools to Family Cottages: Creating Domestic Space for Late Victorian Poor Children', in *Child Welfare and Social Action in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. by Jon Lawrence and Pat Starkey (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), p. 147; Felix Driver, 'Discipline without Frontiers?', 272-293.

³³ Soanes, "The place was a home from home", pp. 102-107; Guyatt, 'A Semblance of Home', pp. 48-49.

³⁴ See for example, Nassau Senior, 'Report on Education of Girls in Pauper Schools'.

³⁵ *The Waifs and Strays Society Annual Report* (December, 1887), p. 5.

³⁶ Jane Hamlett and Lesley Hoskins, 'Comfort in Small Things? Clothing, Control and Agency in County Lunatic Asylums in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-century England', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 18, 1 (2013), 93-114.

homes varied in size according to their function.³⁷ A survey of one hundred and eight homes opened between 1881 and 1911 highlights that forty-five homes were smaller, housing under twenty residents, and many of these with ten or fewer inhabitants. Fifty-two homes imitated Barnardo's system of housing between twenty and forty children. Eleven homes were larger in size, and provided training for older children in skills such as agriculture to enable them to earn a living upon discharge. Although WSS homes still usually housed a greater number of inhabitants than the typical family home, compared to other statutory and voluntary institutions, the WSS appear to have made concerted efforts to create smaller homes for children that aimed to simulate a more natural domestic life.

The materiality of WSS institutional spaces was a vital element in fostering a sense of homeliness. While comfortable homes could alleviate children's anxiety, fright or uneasiness about their new, unfamiliar surroundings and the trauma of their separation from relatives, interior beauty and decoration was synonymous with creating a moralising environment.³⁸ One staff member proclaimed that the beauty and comfort of the institution's material culture could infer moral values on inmates:

...it is not *possible* to surround these poor children with too much refinement and beauty. We have terrible arrears to make up to them, terrible associations to eradicate, terrible notions to explode; in short, we have to find them *not* an institution, but a home; and, say I, the sweeter the better!³⁹

This statement offers a telling narrative of the Society's assumptions about inmates' familial backgrounds, believing that many had come from squalid, immoral homes where basic material and emotional needs were rarely met. As Diana Maltz illustrates, reformers such as Octavia Hill and Jane Nassau Senior, believed in Ruskin's conviction that 'gifts of beauty and culture' could have a remedial, civilising and spiritual effect on the poor and working classes.⁴⁰ Thus, by creating beautiful and comfortable environments, WSS staff believed that they might alleviate and

³⁷ Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans*, pp. 43-66.

³⁸ 'The Home Beautiful', *Our Waifs and Strays* (February, 1908), p. 275.

³⁹ 'Correspondence', *Our Waifs and Strays* (April, 1888), p. 12.

⁴⁰ Diana Maltz, *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes, 1870-1900: Beauty for the People* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 1-41.

compensate for children's perceived want and misery, whilst also facilitating their moral development.

The Society framed their efforts to create a sense of homeliness in contrast to other institutional spaces, which they criticised for the 'maximum of cheapness and the minimum of trouble'.⁴¹ In particular, the WSS rebuffed the material culture of the Poor Law institution, describing these sites as 'monotonous and chilling in its all-pervading drab and whitewash'.⁴² In contrast, the WSS demanded that staff ensure each institutional home was filled with 'colour, glee, and the possibility of home-life and instincts', positioning their spaces as superior to the meagre and elementary provision and care that other institutions offered.⁴³ Another article called for care and effort to be invested in the small interior details:

Do put a dash of pink into the distemper-pail; *do* at least keep an open mind as to the relative cheeriness of a bright bed rug; *do* split up the acreage of bare walls with here and there a text and a picture...

Colourful material culture and ornamentation that sought to both civilise inmates and also elicit pleasure and appreciation was positioned in stark contrast to the puritanical environments of other institutions, as well as children's familial homes, which reformers understood to be the antithesis of 'home'. Decorative objects, such as vases filled with handpicked flowers and other glass and china ornaments, were considered necessary additions to the institution to achieve a sense of beauty and homeliness.⁴⁴ These practices reflected those proposed in contemporary advice manuals, which suggested that 'grace and beauty of design and colour' might imbue residents with a love and appreciation for their surroundings, and help to enhance their bodily and mental health and wellbeing.⁴⁵

Several photographs depict the interior spaces of WSS homes and provide insight into how these ideals were physically enacted in these spaces. Although the

⁴¹ 'News and Views', *Our Waifs and Strays* (June, 1887), p. 5.

⁴² 'The Home Beautiful', *Our Waifs and Strays* (February, 1908), p. 275.

⁴³ 'The Home Beautiful', *Our Waifs and Strays* (February, 1908), p. 275.

⁴⁴ 'The Home Beautiful', *Our Waifs and Strays* (February, 1908), p. 275.

⁴⁵ Edis, *Decoration and Furniture of Town Houses*, p. 231.

purpose of many published photographs was to showcase the Society's domestic aims to their supporters, they remain valuable sources in understanding how the Society imagined and communicated their childcare ideals and practices. A photograph of the Bradstock Lockett dormitory for disabled girls depicts a number of inhabitants sitting informally amongst the neatly made beds (figure 1).

Figure 1: Girls' Dormitory, Bradstock Lockett Home, c. 1910. Copyright The Children's Society

Numerous windows allowed a bright and airy feel to the room, as did electric or gas lighting, which would have provided comfort in the darker months. Pictures hung on the far walls, the tiled, striped lower wall and patterned bedspreads added interest, colour and individuality to the room - elements commonly perceived to be lacking from other, larger institutions. The stove heater, which assumed a central position in the room, would have ensured some comfort and warmth for inhabitants, especially for those suffering from ill health, while also providing a focal point for sociability. Meanwhile, easy-to-clean materials, such as wooden floors and tiled lower walls, reflected the practical and hygienic concerns associated with caring for large groups of children. In all likelihood too, these materials and the vaulted ceiling shaped the room's acoustic so that small noises were magnified and perhaps carried, alerting the matron of the possibility of any 'wayward' behaviour.

The placement of chairs around the heater and the girls' apparent choice to use this space for social interaction instead of other rooms, may position the bedroom as a private yet shared space in which they felt comfortable. Several historians have drawn attention to the importance of the hearth as the metaphorical heart of the home, where families spent time socialising and where the most powerful individuals of the household, such as fathers, were often found.⁴⁶ The congregation of girls seated around the stove heater also reinforces its role in providing domestic warmth and

⁴⁶ Strange, 'Fatherhood, Furniture and the Inter-Personal Dynamics of Working-Class Homes'; Doolittle, 'Time, Space, and Memories'; John Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values* (New York: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 94-95.

comfort and as an element around which the sociability of the home occurred. The dormitory was probably the only space in the home that the girls considered personal – their own – and where their belongings were kept. This was also the space in which intimate moments could occur: expressions of solidarity and compassion between residents, moments of vulnerability and consolation, and where friendships could be created. Moreover, since the matron was usually assigned a separate bedroom in each home, supervision and authority in this room was unlikely to have been constant. However, the layout and design of the home was also likely to have been more specific in its arrangement given its purpose to house disabled inmates. It is possible therefore, that the girls spent more time in this room for ease and comfort, and that design reflected its function. Other accounts confirm the similar design and adornment of dormitories in various WSS homes.⁴⁷

A photograph of St Winifred's Home provides further insight into attempts to create beauty and comfort (figure 2). This photograph depicts an inviting sitting room through the doorway on the right, with wallpaper, painted walls, and soft furnishings including carpeted floors all adding some colour to the space. The ornate sideboard displays a wealth of china and ornaments, some of which are decoratively patterned, adding interest and variation to the room. Similar furnishing styles are visible in the hallway.

Yet the neatness of the rooms suggests a sense of order and decorum governed the appearance of and expected behaviour within the home, indicating that the creation of a sense of beauty and comfort was not perhaps targeted towards inhabitants. St Winifred's residents were females, aged 18-21, who entered the home in between domestic service situations, and were actively looking for employment. The neat and ordered interior here reflected the formality of the households that many inmates would eventually be employed in, and therefore, helped teach them the need for care and respect in these sites. St Winifred's appeared to lack the 'homeliness' and comfort cultivated in other WSS homes, and it is likely that these elements were not considered to be as imperative for older inhabitants whose presence in this home was transient. Instead, the environment was probably intended to reinforce domestic

⁴⁷ 'St Agnes' Home', *Our Waifs and Strays* (February, 1893), pp. 18-19.

authority for inhabitants who were about to enter service, and the social world of residents in this home which paralleled those encountered in many domestic service roles.

Figure 2: St Winifred's Home, Clapham, c. 1915. Copyright The Children's Society

II. Creating domestic authority in the institution

Whilst material culture went some way to establishing a sense of home, expressions of authority and other childcare practices that intended to manage behaviour did not necessarily mean that 'homeliness' was diminished or that the homes were designed to be totalising institutions. Home itself was the original location of ideas and practices of authority, which could be played out through both domestic authority and the interactions and relationships within these spaces.⁴⁸ Instead, authority helped to shape how inmates experienced the material and social world of the institution, and importantly, could enhance inhabitants' sense of home by strengthening a sense of group membership, identity, and responsibility. Victorian notions of the home as a private haven dislocated from the public world were reflected in physical terms in WSS institutions, notably the use of fencing and other barriers.⁴⁹ The fences and gates seen in the Knebworth, Lee Cottage, and Prospect Homes may be read as expressions that articulated the Society's authority over the intersections between public and private worlds (figures 3-5). The trees and mature gardens of the Rose Cottage Home further reinforce the barriers between the private home and outside life (figure 6). Other homes, such as Scholfield Home, possessed large grounds that further separated inmates from local communities (figure 7). Fencing and other barriers, however, tended not to be high enough to appear imposing or unwelcoming to outsiders. Yet these means of designating privacy still impeded, policed and restricted unwelcome or

⁴⁸ *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800*, ed. by Griffin, Delap and Wills.

⁴⁹ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 357-397.

unsolicited visitors to the home, as well as those inhabitants who desired to leave the institution.

Figure 3: Knebworth Home for Boys, c. 1894. Copyright The Children's Society

Figure 4: Lee cottage Home for Girls, c. 1888. Copyright The Children's Society

Figure 5: Prospect Home Lodge, Reading, c. 1905. Copyright The Children's Society

Figure 6: Rose Cottage, Dickleburgh, c. 1900. Copyright The Children's Society

Figure 7: Scholfield Home for Girls, Wavertree, 1897. Copyright The Children's Society

For inmates, these barriers were likely to have been understood as the boundaries of the home, clearly marking the threshold between home and the outside world. Inmates' entry into the world beyond the institutional home and the local community would have been granted only by permission and subject staff members' supervision. Authority was thus circumscribed in physical terms to keep inmates within the confines of the home, ensuring their safety, security and importantly, control. Boundaries limited children's freedom of movement - a liberty that reformers argued was endemic amongst working-class children, whose working parents were often unable to supervise them and were accustomed to playing or loitering in the streets.⁵⁰ Instead, the Society visibly designated acceptable spaces in which children could move, work and play, and it is likely that entrances to the home were kept locked, prohibiting children's agency and autonomy. Such practices could further reinforce the institution's authority and children's position as confined inmates, while the requirement for permission to move in and out of the home emphasised children's dependence on staff members.

⁵⁰ Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, pp. 57-74.

Boundaries inside the home also guided inmates' engagement with their environment and reflected designation of space and norms of childhood movement within the middle-class Victorian home. In WSS homes, distinct spaces such as separate sitting rooms and bedrooms for matrons and masters, for example, enforced authority and social hierarchy. A photograph of the matron Mrs. Bailey in her sitting room in St Andrew's Home in Derbyshire reflects the hierarchies that existed within the institutional home (figure 8). The opulence of the curtain and carpet fabrics, complemented by the delicate, feminine and ornate furniture styles gives the room an air of luxury indicating its private use by the matron. Its rich interior also distinguished its function from the more utilitarian communal areas that inmates inhabited. The creation of such spaces aimed to elevate the status and authority of staff members, many of whom, were respectable working-class individuals. The depiction of the matron in best dress with her dog, a common and potent symbol of middle-class distinction, further defines the room as a space of privilege and authority.⁵¹

Although these rooms claimed titles such as 'matron's sitting room', inhabitants' relationships with designated spaces in the home could fluctuate, as Jane Hamlett indicates in her research on the middle-class home.⁵² Hamlett argues that these spaces did not necessarily guarantee the privacy of the isolated individual, but instead, spatial division was used to negotiate relationships between household members and to create and reinforce specific hierarchies and roles in the household. That the Society used these spaces to negotiate relationships, particularly between adults and children, was confirmed in their literature: children were not always excluded from such sites, and rules that restricted access to spaces were contravened when circumstance dictated. Accounts confirm that inmates often retired to the matron's sitting room in the evening for quiet activities such as needlework or reading.⁵³ Children's presence in these rooms flouted the conventions attached to their supposed use and provided opportunities for socialisation between inmates and staff. However, children's access by invitation to enter these rooms, as well as the likelihood of the matron's continued presence and supervision over children, indicates

⁵¹ Harriet Ritvo, 'Pride and Pedigree: The Evolution of the Victorian Dog Fancy', *Victorian Studies* 29 (1986), 227-253.

⁵² Hamlett, *Material Relations*, pp. 40-41.

⁵³ 'Our Kensington Family', *Our Waifs and Strays* (November, 1902), pp. 398-399.

that domestic authority, hierarchy and division underpinned inmates' relationships with these spaces. Permission to enter the rooms, in all probability, was granted only according to the display of appropriate behaviour or as a reward, and thus emphasises the boundaries of agency and authority in physical terms within the home. But these spaces could also underwrite affective relationships in the institution: this division of space, and the distinctive nature of children's time spent within these sites, was probably accentuated and invested with special meaning for inmates.

Figure 8: Mrs. Bailey and her dog, c. 1901. Copyright The Children's Society

Despite efforts to create a sense of homeliness that was in contrast to the monotonous living the WSS associated with Poor Law institutions, there should be no doubt that children's movement was still highly regimented. Authority and control was established through daily schedules of chores, education, and leisure, as the Marylebone Home timetable demonstrates (figure 9). A similar timetable implemented in the Dulwich Girls' Home suggests that during the holidays, children were expected to help around the home, but that staff also organised leisure activities and holidays to the countryside or the sea for inmates.⁵⁴

*Figure 9: Timetable, Marylebone Home, (Our Waifs and Strays, January 1893, p. 9).
Copyright The Children's Society*

Timetables appear rigid in structure and with little time for flexibility around set tasks. The freedom to perform various personal activities, such as time spent alone and unsupervised, or the ability to visit friends and family, was denied, thereby reinforcing institutional authority. Furthermore, playtime and social interaction between residents was limited and at the end of the day when children's energy was probably waning. It is possible that the Society hoped that this routine might tire inmates out before going to bed and consequently that disruptive behaviour at

⁵⁴ 'Our Receiving Houses', *Our Waifs and Strays* (October, 1882), p. 3.

bedtime was kept to a minimum. Chores such as housework also added a strenuous element to daily routines, although several timetables indicate that children under ten were usually excluded from performing these duties and instead, taken for walks by staff.⁵⁵ These timetables further helped the WSS exert authority and manage inmates by establishing easily recognisable patterns of movement and behaviour. This type of labour was not wholly unlike that expected of inmates in disciplinary institutions, such as industrial schools or homes for fallen women, where work functioned as an important path to moral reformation.⁵⁶ It is likely that the Society believed that work might achieve a similar goal, while also instilling the ethics of hard work in working-class children. Nevertheless, these expectations of children to perform this labour did not diverge entirely from those within the working-class home, where children were often responsible for making important contributions to the home and household economy, by taking on a range of domestic chores, caring for siblings, and working part-time jobs to supplement familial income.⁵⁷

Yet an explanation following the Marylebone Home's timetable suggests that this routine had less influence over home life than appeared: 'they represent only *what* is done. *How* and *why* things are done gives to them their real significance'.⁵⁸ Rather, timetables were used to present a basic structure of daily living, but that there was flexibility in how time was spent, the possibility to deviate from set routines. As such, timetables may have had little effect in diminishing a sense of natural home life: middle-class homes were noted for their rigid routines and timetables, and similar structuring of time was implemented in other institutional spaces, such as asylums and schools.⁵⁹ Rather, while the structure of time was important to managing and training children within the institutional home, the statement suggests that other facets of daily living that included household time spent together, and the education, morals and meaning behind such routines, was more important to children's development than

⁵⁵ 'Clarendon Home House for Girls', *Our Waifs and Strays* (October, 1894), pp. 349-351.

⁵⁶ See Susan Mumm, "'Not Worse than Other Girls': The Convent-Based Rehabilitation of Fallen Women in Victorian Britain', *Journal of Social History* 29 (1996), 527-546; Linda Mahood, *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1990), pp. 75-119; Alana Barton, "'Wayward Girls and Wicked Women': Two Centuries of "Semi-Penal" Control', *Liverpool Law Review* 22 (2000), 157-171.

⁵⁷ Davin *Growing up Poor*, 157-199; Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 148-162.

⁵⁸ 'Timetable, Marylebone Home', *Our Waifs and Strays*, (January, 1893), p. 9.

⁵⁹ Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution*, pp. 9-10, p. 52, p. 62, p.101.

merely complying with a timetable. Moreover, it was likely that daily routines reflected the management and caring styles of matrons and masters in the homes, as well as the specific and immediate needs of inhabitants. As such, the home life of inmates in the institution could vary in each WSS home.

Institutional rules and regulations also centred on the display of good behaviour and recognition of authority. The staff handbook demonstrates that a standardised system of punishment was implemented to discipline children across all the homes (figure 10).

Figure 10: Punishment in Boys' Homes, (Handbook for Workers, Part II, 1904, p. 19). Copyright The Children's Society

Punishments within boys' homes were categorised according to severity of the offence, and guidance in staff handbooks recommended that confinement and chastisement be resorted to only in serious cases. Yet no further indication was given about what constituted a serious offence, and consequently, inmates' experience of punishment throughout the residential homes most likely varied considerably and according to the individual personalities of staff members. Punishment was also gender specific: physical punishment was not incorporated into regimes in girls' homes but followed similar conventions to boys' punishments in all other aspects. Furthermore, none of the rules were to be applied to children under six years of age.⁶⁰ Although attitudes to children's corporal punishment were changing by the end of the century, WSS punishments were comparable with other contemporary punitive practices. Corporal punishment was retained and tolerated in schools as a common, natural part of childhood into the twentieth century, and WSS policies about punishment suggest that corporal punishment was considered to be an integral part of their child-rearing duties in the absence of parents' authority.⁶¹ However, surviving punishment records suggest that corporal punishment was rarely used. Rather,

⁶⁰ The Waifs and Strays Society, *Handbook for Workers Part II*, p. 20.

⁶¹ Jacob Middleton, 'The Experience of Corporal Punishment in Schools, 1890-1940', *History of Education* 37 (2008), 272-273.

matrons and masters corrected children's perceived bad behaviour through the deprivation of rewards and treats, or by being sent to bed early without pudding.⁶²

Only an exceptional case, from a sample of nearly one thousand children's case records, suggests that corporal punishment was used by the matron to correct the behaviour of one girl, Nellie P. In 1905, neighbours made two complaints about a staff member at the Rose Cottage Home for using a slipper to reprimand Nellie. The record does not state the circumstances under which the neighbours witnessed the incidents. Following intervention by the NSPCC and WSS founder Edward de Montjoie Rudolf, the NSPCC were satisfied that the matron would no longer use a slipper as a form of punishment, which was noted to be 'peculiar and antiquated'.⁶³ Letters also suggest that the WSS had discouraged her methods, stating that corporal punishment of any kind was generally not resorted to in the Society. Although the children at the home were noted to be 'clean, well nourished, well clothed...and appeared bright and contented' by the NSPCC officer, records suggest that the Society removed the matron from her position of caring for the children at the home.⁶⁴

Although punishment was similar to other contemporary disciplinary practices, histories of children's institutions have drawn attention to reformatory and disciplinary practices, which have reinforced understandings of the institution as brutal and uncaring.⁶⁵ Other evidence suggests that many children were victims of deliberate abuse.⁶⁶ While these are important issues to acknowledge and uncover, historians have tended to overlook the more nuanced systems of management, control and discipline of children in the institution as a focus on trauma and abuse in institutions has come to dominate accounts of institutional childcare histories. The WSS promoted a 'system of rewards and encouragement', for example, to promote discipline and good behaviour, while punishment was considered a last resort.⁶⁷ Staff handbooks suggest that staff members were expected to provide guidance and

⁶² The Waifs and Strays Society, *Punishment book, Hunstanton Home, 1897-1899*.

⁶³ Case file 9716, Letter from NSPCC to Edward de Montjoie Rudolf, 28/2/1905.

⁶⁴ Case file 9716, Letter from NSPCC to Rudolf, 28/2/1905; letter from Rudolf to NSPCC, 8/3/1905; letter from Rudolf to Mr Warr, 16/3/1905; and, letter from Rudolf to Rev. Arthur, 16/3/1905.

⁶⁵ For children's reform, see Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans*, pp. 120-142.

⁶⁶ Abrams, *The Orphan Country*, pp. 246-254; Swain and Hillel, *Child, Nation, Race and Empire*, pp. 159-175.

⁶⁷ WSS, *Handbook for Workers, Part II*, p. 10.

supportive influence over children that imitated disciplinary practices in schools and homes. Within institutional homes, the regulation of children's conduct was based on merit systems that rewarded good behaviour in the first instance. In the Marylebone Girls' Home, points were given to each girl for housework duties, tidiness and punctuality, and those who had not lost any marks during the week were awarded a star and a treat.⁶⁸ Other practices that rewarded behaviour were wide ranging across the homes: an annual prize-giving event at the Cold Ash Home, for example, rewarded inmates for behaviours such as the 'best tempered' and 'most unselfish' child.⁶⁹

Central to the idea of homeliness in WSS institutions was the notion of nurture: home was where children were cared for and care about. As such, the Society implemented a range of practices, such as the elimination of uniforms, treats for children, celebrations, and other affective practices such as the giving of pocket money or small presents, that intended to enhance children's positive social and emotional experiences, their sense of home, family, and belonging within the institutional unit. These practices, which I have discussed elsewhere, were used as frameworks to nurture the social and emotional development of children and offer the possibility of creating positive, meaningful experiences within the institution.⁷⁰ Children's ability to demonstrate agency and responsibility was also vital to fostering a sense of being at home in the institution. In order to enhance inmates' sense of responsibility, the Society encouraged institutional homes to implement practices of keeping and rearing domestic pets and other animals. The presence of animals within WSS homes was a means of teaching inmates the valuable lessons of responsibility and care, as well as love and affection, which were implicit duties of child rearing within the biological family unit. The WSS stated that keeping pets would encourage positive emotional responses in children, by teaching them the 'many lessons which the care of some gentle, loveable animal would give'.⁷¹ The care of animals encouraged children to recognise the values of respect and humanity, as well as how to express compassion, kindness, affection and love.

⁶⁸ 'Notes from the Homes' *Our Waifs and Strays* (January, 1893), pp. 8-9; 'Notes from the Homes' *Our Waifs and Strays* (April, 1886), p. 2, p. 6.

⁶⁹ 'Notes from the Homes, *Our Waifs and Strays* (March, 1890), p. 2.

⁷⁰ Soares, 'Neither Waif nor Stray', pp. 148-195.

⁷¹ 'Thoughts, facts and fancies', *Our Waifs and Strays* (April, 1888), p. 13.

Given the importance of emotional and social care in the Society's childcare ideology, pet-keeping practices formed one element of a broader set of nurturing practices that sought to foster children's self-worth and individuality, to help build their emotional capacity, and to provide some pleasure and companionship while living out of the family home.⁷² But it is difficult to ascertain how children responded to pet-keeping responsibilities. It is probable that even for those who may not have felt much enthusiasm about caring for these animals, at the very least, pets provided some entertainment, comfort, or distraction from the psychological unease of institutional life, which for many, was an isolating and traumatic experience.

Indeed, the increasing presence of pets within the everyday life of the home and family in the nineteenth century, and the growing status and meaning attached to pet keeping, suggests that pets could play an important role in shaping the emotional life of the household. Becky Tipper's research on children's relationships with animals, for example, argues that the importance of the social aspects of human-animal relationships is often overlooked.⁷³ By asking children to reflect on 'who mattered' to them, her research demonstrates that children were often eager to talk about their relationship with animals, suggesting that they viewed their pets as social actors and family participants in their own right.⁷⁴ This, she argues, shaped how children understood their relationships with animals in terms of kinship, 'relatedness' and as 'part of the family'.⁷⁵

The representation of pets in a number of WSS 'home' portraits highlights their importance to the residents pictured with them, and the position they assumed within the institutional family. The deliberate inclusion of pets in photographs suggests that children's sense of home and how they defined 'family', in many cases, could extend to include the pets they cared for, perhaps indicating their fondness of and attachment to these animals. Inhabitants' relationships with animals within WSS

⁷² For discussions of nurturing, kindness and affective practices in the institution see Soares, 'Neither Waif nor Stray', pp. 148-195.

⁷³ Becky Tipper, "'A Dog Who I Know Quite Well': Everyday Relationships Between Children and Animals', *Children's Geographies* 9 (2011), 146.

⁷⁴ Tipper, "'A Dog Who I Know Quite Well,'" 145-165.

⁷⁵ Tipper, "'A Dog Who I Know Quite Well,'" 149; See also, Kathleen Kete, *The Beast in the Boudoir: Pet-Keeping in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

homes therefore, can be understood within the social context of children's lives. Rather than understood merely as living creatures or working animals that inhabited the same space as WSS inhabitants, the act of photographing animals suggests that children were likely to have enjoyed personal, intimate and distinctive relationships with these pets, or at least encouraged to do so - valuing them in and of their own right within the institutional household unit. A photograph of a group of girls who were about to leave St Nicholas' home to enter domestic service includes their matron as well as their pet goat (figure 11). The choice to include the pet goat in the photograph suggests that at the very least, the animal was supposed to be remembered as an integral and memorable part of their home life. Furthermore, the publication of such photographs in the Society's monthly magazine demonstrates the importance the WSS placed on affective dynamics and the notion of family togetherness in photographing and showcasing this final portrait of the home's inhabitants.

The photograph suggests too, that there is a sense of mischief in their pet - held and controlled by the matron, the goat's presence in the scene disrupts the intended message of the picture to showcase the institution's success in training these girls to be obedient, tidy, formal domestic servants. Although dressed in their domestic service uniforms and holding trays of food in an attempt to communicate the best behaviour they needed to show for their future employment, the goat distracts the girls, who appear to be smiling and stifling laughter. The sense of laughter and joking that the image portrays suggests not only the importance of the goat to the household but also that the presence of this animal played a role in helping inmates to build playful, close and affectionate relationships with their co-residents and carer.

Figure 11: The girls of St Nicholas' with their goat, St Nicholas' Home, Pyrford, c. 1915. Copyright The Children's Society

Similarly, children's responsibility for caring for their pet dog in St Mark's home resulted in it being taken on holiday and its inclusion in the home's portraits (figure 12). It is likely that the dog's inclusion in this photograph required some effort in its staging and in the control of the dog, suggesting that the pet was an important and valued member of the institutional home. As other studies have shown, pet dogs

were aspirational symbols.⁷⁶ The ownership of the terrier pictured here, not only communicated notions of bourgeois domesticity and home, but also a sense of fun, activeness and energy, which perhaps mirrored the home and its inhabitants.

Figure 12: A group photograph of St Mark's annual trip, c. 1918. Copyright The Children's Society

While children inhabiting WSS institutions may have considered some of these pets to be 'family' members, these animals played an important role in teaching children valuable lessons about domesticity, family and responsibility. The care of pets had significant implications for poorer children, particularly girls, in providing them with a domestic education that centred on infant care training. The rituals of caring for animals helped to develop understanding of motherhood and maternal attitudes, which in many cases, institutional staff noted that poor mothers appeared to lack.⁷⁷ Such training guided children to recognise their future responsibilities as parents to raise and nurture their children independently.

III. Conclusion

The study of WSS institutional sites demonstrates the Society's ideals and attempts to construct a stable home life for inmates, which mimicked the aesthetics and sensibilities of the middle-class family home. In particular, the essay has drawn attention to how WSS ideas of 'homeliness' centred on domestic comfort, longevity of children's placement in the home, as well as the enactment of specific rules and practices that sought to direct and nurture children's social and emotional development. In doing so, the essay has also highlighted the important role of material culture and how differences in design, decoration, and structure of the institution's physical environment might impact on and manipulate residents' experiences and behaviour.

Authoritative boundaries and structured daily home-life governed inmates' experiences and helped to reinforce values of order, responsibility and structure.

⁷⁶ Kete, *The Beast in the Boudoir*; Ritvo, *The Animal Estate*, pp. 102-115.

⁷⁷ 'Cameos from life - worse than motherless' *Our Waifs and Strays* (July, 1905), p.120.

Importantly, domestic authority should not be viewed as the antithesis of 'homeliness'. Instead, institutional practices that reinforced authority aimed to enhance and cement a sense of togetherness, group membership, and belonging or feeling at home. Consideration of practices such as pet keeping also adds to our understanding of the everyday domestic lives of those residing in the institutional space. Not only did the WSS believe that material spaces could be designed to fulfil inmates' needs for comfort and nurture, but that the social and affective experiences and interactions that took place in these sites, also helped to teach inmates important moral and social skills and how to be part of a family unit. Like the physical environment, practices such as pet keeping were perceived to be therapeutic and transformative in their power to reform children, socially and emotionally. As such, through the examination of the creation of institutional 'homeliness', its routines, and practices such as pet keeping, the essay highlights the possibility of a more positive assessment of children's institutions' aims and practices that depart from common narratives of discipline and reform.

Consideration of domesticity and authority in WSS institutions has significant implications for histories of childhood, welfare, the family and home in the Victorian period. Comparable to recent research on a range of institutions for adult populations, evidence here suggests that a significant amount of institutional provision for children was more concerned with providing inmates with a sense of home and belonging than historians have previously asserted. This concern was influenced by the various contemporary literature and guidance produced for the middle classes that focussed on the ways in which the home space could hold an educative and moralising power in children's development. Similarly, institutional policy and practice in many cases, was focussed on the ways in which institutional material culture and space might impact on inmates' physical, social and emotional experiences, and on their moral education. Examination of inmates' physical, social and emotional experiences of growing up outside the orthodox family setting, and within a manufactured 'home' and 'family' is important for histories of childhood. Not only does it provide new insight into the ways that institutions created a dual or alternative model of home and family, but it also has implications for emerging scholarship that evaluates the meaning and experiences of home for varied social groups through the examination of material culture as a focal point.

The study of the WSS contributes to new understandings of institutional models of home that renegotiated and extended definitions of the middle-class home in design and decoration, by using the children's institution as a case study. Institutional design was influenced by attitudes towards material culture and childhood outside the institution, and demonstrate that welfare officials recognised the importance of creating a sense of home for vulnerable children living in the institution. Indeed, the Waifs and Strays Society's attempts to create a sense of 'homeliness' for child inmates appear to be a forerunner of twentieth century ideas on making institutional spaces more homely and comfortable for children that resided in these spaces. As such, greater study of institutional childcare practices in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods would likely confirm and emphasise the individualism of institutional policies that contributed to gradual, piecemeal development and progress of childcare policy and practice within a broader context of Victorian welfare provision.

Biography

Claudia Soares is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at Queen Mary, University of London, and currently working on research project that examines the history of emotions in nineteenth-century child welfare institutions in Britain, Australia, and Canada. She completed her PhD at The University of Manchester, which examined ideas of home and family in The Waifs and Strays Society. She has previously published work on patient experiences in nineteenth-century female inebriate institutions in *Cultural and Social History*.