

OFFICIAL OPENING OF BOYS HOSTEL

Film ID: 3837 **Year:** 1929

This film is one of a number of films recently discovered when Hull City Archives transferred to the new Hull History Centre in 2009. The film provides a fascinating glimpse into a hidden, and somewhat murky, aspect of British history: the migration of children to British colonies. It was made by local Beverley filmmakers Debenham and Co, who made many films in Hull over the years – see the Context for *Royal Visit to Hull* (1941) for more on Debenhams. Unfortunately no information came with the film, but we can make a rough assessment of the date from the fact that Councillor Benno Pearlman was made Lord Mayor of the City in 1928. At present we do not have a more exact date for the opening of this Hostel, or indeed any records for the Hostel, including where it was situated. Any contributions of information on the Hostel would be most welcome.

Both Benno Pearlman and Lord Deramore were major figures in the local establishment, and both very active in local politics for many years. The Lord Deramore in the film would be the 3rd Lord Deramore, or 3rd Baron Deramore of Belvoir, Robert Wilfred de Yarburgh-Bateson – his younger brother, George Nicholas Bateson, succeeded him as 4th Lord Deramore in 1936. Among the many titles held by Lord Deramore are Honorary Elder Brother of Hull Trinity House, Chairman of the East Riding County Council, Lord-Lieutenant of the East Riding, Lieutenant-Colonel in the service of the Yorkshire Hussars, and Justice of the Peace for the West Riding. His mother was a member of the Yarburgh family who lived at Heslington Hall in York (this was sold with its estate in the early 1960s and the hall is now part of York University). There is a Lord Deramore's Primary School in Heslington, opened in 1856.

Benno Pearlman, a solicitor, had been a Conservative Councillor for some time before becoming Sheriff of Hull in 1922-1923. He was an Alderman for many years, often warring with the local Labour controlled authorities. But apparently he claimed that his greatest achievement whilst Lord Mayor was the formation of the Hull Old Grammarians Lodge, as an active Freemason (he was for many years the Chairman of the School Governors). He was also a Founder Member of De La Pole Lodge and the Thesaurus Lodge, the first Master of the Andrew Marvell Lodge and a Past Master of the Montefiore Lodge. There is a full-length portrait of Benno Pearlman in the Guildhall.

It is no surprise then that these two gentlemen should be at the opening of this Hostel; although one suspects they wouldn't have had relatives there. But it might come as a surprise to many that there was such a Hostel at all. The migration of children to Australia and Canada has been in the news recently when, on February 2010, Gordon Brown made a statement in the Commons apologising for the treatment of former child migrants. Most of the publicity around this focused on the wartime migrants when 2,663 children were evacuated overseas. But in fact the practice of actively sending children overseas goes back to 1619 when 100 street children were taken from the city of London to Virginia to supply labour to plantation owners.

This becomes a large scale phenomenon from the 1860s when unemployment shot up in the cities. There were already immigration schemes for adults and their families from the 1850s, and this was extended to children on their own who were living on the street, destitute or in work houses. The two early pioneers of this were Maria Rye and Annie Macpherson; joined sometime after by Dr Barnado, whose homes were responsible for half of the 80,000 children sent to Canada between 1870 and 1914.

Roger Kershaw of the National Archives states that, "British government records show that at least 150,000 children, aged between three and 14, were shipped abroad, mainly to Australia and Canada, under a programme that began in the 1920s and did not stop until 1967." He states that the reason for this government policy was the large numbers coming into the cities, result in food scarcities, epidemics such as cholera and smallpox, and an acute shortage of housing. This was a cooperative enterprise with local government and workhouses. Yet, according to Kristen Rundle (see References), the Empire Settlement Act of 1922, which sanctioned this, says nothing whatsoever about child migration. Yet a four-page advertising spread in *The Times* in June 1934 depicted miserable children in British slums next to happy faces on the docks, with the caption "Good-bye to all that!" Rundle goes on to say that however well-intentioned this may have been – the motives differed greatly – it "failed to understand that connection to family and identity, and being regarded as deserving of choices in life, are values too great to measure."

We do not know what fate awaited the children on show in this film, so well dressed and well groomed. This exportation of cheap labour – in effect involuntary economic migrants – was happening all over the country. It is to be hoped that they did not suffer the physical, sexual and psychological abuse and neglect that so many did. Shamefully this was often done under by purportedly Christian organisations. For those who have been affected there are now campaigning organisations like the Child Migrants Trust. One wonders whether many of the boys smiling in this film would, in later life, have been happy with the description of "boys of the Bulldog Breed", making "a name for Good Old England."

References

***Burke's Peerage and Baronetage*, 106th edition, Editor Charles Mosley, 2 Volumes, Burke's Peerage Ltd, 1999.**

Roger Kershaw and Janet Sacks, *New Lives for Old: The Story of Britain's child migrants: The Story of Britain's Home Children*, The National Archives, 2008.

Kristen Rundle, Apology to a lost generation, *The Guardian*, 24.02.2010.

R. L. Schnell, 'The right class of boy: youth training schemes and assisted emigration to Canada under the Empire Settlement Act, 1922-39', *History of Education*, Volume 24, Issue 2, March 1995, pp 73-90

Roger Kershaw at the National Archives, [Child emigration to Canada](#)

Stephen Constantine, [Child migration: philanthropy, the state and the empire](#)

[Hull Old Grammarians Lodge](#)

[The Peerage](#)

[The Child Migrants Trust](#)