

BEECHHOLME IS A VILLAGE.

c: 1973

Mr Johnson ?

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LOCATION.

Beechholme is situated in the urban district of Banstead in the county of Surrey and it is a long, narrow estate comprising of some 40 acres on the northern side of Fir Tree Road - B.280. (Map reference TQ 234608 0 1" map 170). It is bounded on the north by the Epsom Downs Line, Southern Region, - trains from Victoria and London Bridge via Sutton, and is some 7 minutes walking distance from Banstead station. It can also be reached by the 164 bus either from Morden Station at the termination of the Northern Underground Line. (Buses travel via Rosehill, Sutton, Belmont, Banstead Village in the Epsom direction) or from Epsom (starting point about 200 yards from Epsom station on the Waterloo-Epsom or Victoria-Epsom lines, Southern Region - turn right on leaving the station.

The land falls gradually to the north where beyond the railway line it is adjoined by farmland. On the south rising land formerly used for agricultural purposes was built up in the mid-war years and is now predominantly a high class residential dormitory suburb. About half the land on the Beechholme estate consists of playing areas. Of four open spaces, two adjoining making together some 10 acres, one consists of a tree-lined playing field and the other a wooded area with about 4 acres of open space.

CAMPUS.

The main accommodation area is defined by a magnificent beech avenue, 660 yards long, on either side of which the houses are ranged in a rather severe line. There are 24 of these, 16 of which are occupied by children and the remainder are used for other purposes including staff accommodation. Other buildings include Medical Rooms, a Nursery Play Group, a dining-room for mid-day meals for primary school children, a swimming bath, workshops, administrative buildings, a chapel which was destroyed by fire early in 1968, the old Gymnasium now used largely as a club and two classrooms for remedial education centres. There is in addition a small staff training centre. The primary school is run separately by the Inner London Education Authority and also adjoins the avenue. The accommodation is completed by three separate houses for senior staff. There is also a classroom for remedial education.

HISTORY

The original parcel of land was bought in two pieces in 1876 by the parishes of St. Mary Abbott in Kensington and St. Luke in Chelsea, acting as a school district board. It then amounted to more than 140 acres (over 100 acres being used as farmland). Apart from four children's houses added in 1881 the whole estate was ready for occupation in 1880 and was opening in July of that year with the transfer of the children from premises belonging to the Board at Hammersmith. The whole purpose was to remove children subject to the provisions of the Poor Law from contact with adult inmates, in the workhouses. It was regarded at the time as a revolutionary experiment to provide separate accommodation for smaller groups of children in opposition to the generally accepted "barrack" principle of the day in which enormous numbers of children were accommodated under one roof. It incorporated the principle of houseparents, in many cases married couples, in which the husband was also employed on the estate following his own occupation. In some cases he acted as instructor to groups of children during their last year before going out into employment. These included the tailor, the baker and several other essential trades.

The estate was not only isolated geographically but even more effectively by its ability to be self-contained. The farm and market garden produced a high proportion of the essential produce; most of the clothing, including footwear, were made on the premises. From the beginning the numbers rose steadily and at one point the admissions rose to an all time high of 676. The daily cost was about 7s.6d per child per day. A rise to 7s.6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. would have been regarded as a serious matter. The Boards of Guardians remained responsible until the 1st April, 1930. In 1916 children from St. Marylebone had come to Banstead after the loss of accommodation at Southall. The St. Marylebone Guardians joined the Board. Any unneeded vacancies which arose were offered to neighbouring authorities and children came from the Epsom Union and others to fill these places. Throughout this period it was known as the Kensington and Chelsea District School.

On 1st April, 1930, the functions of the Boards of Guardians ceased and the responsibility for Poor Law establishments was handed over to County Councils. The London County Council Education Committee accepted responsibility and from then until early in 1949 ran it under the name of

Banstead Residential School as part of its Special Services Branch. From 1880 education had been provided for all ages from infant to secondary stages. Early in the 1930's an opportunity arose for children of secondary age to go out to school. Two local secondary schools had been built by the Surrey County Council and were underpopulated. Not only were children transferred to these schools but some of the teaching staff went as well. It must have been a very new experience for children from so closed a community to spend some part of their day with children living in normal homes but the numbers involved meant that the total effect was probably no more than transferring a group from one place to another.

With the passing of the Children Act in 1948 the London County Council along with other authorities appointed its first Children's Officer. Early in 1949 under the new Children's Department the responsibility for the establishment was transferred to the Children's Committee. The Primary School remained under the Education Committee but to all intents and purposes it continued to be run at least for the next five years as a residential school. With the retirement of the headmaster/superintendent in 1953 and the appointment of a new head in 1954 the changeover from a predominantly school-based enterprise to a residential child care orientated organisation was made possible. The progress toward the establishment of a children's community with increasingly independent houses, generally a long and slow process, was well under way by 1956.

On 1st April, 1965, the London Government Act dissolved the London County Council and transferred various of the personal services from the County Council to the newly formed London Boroughs. Beechholme, the name which the establishment had assumed soon after the creation of the Children's Department, was assigned to the new London Borough of Wandsworth.

ORGANISATION

The main responsibility to the Director of Social Services and hence to the Social Services Committee devolves upon the Superintendent who is assisted by a Deputy, together with a Matron, Deputy Matron and Assistant Matron who form the senior staff team. Each member of this team has specific responsibilities - some administrative, some advisory, consultative and supportive (both to staff and to children). Each house is economically independent, deciding its own budget, feeding, clothing, holidays etc. A policy of increasing autonomy is being carried forward.

The responsibility for the day to day running of each house devolves upon the houseparent in charge. The majority of the houses contain 13 children - a few have 16 and one or two have smaller groups. In each case houses cover a wide age range, some taking the full range from 2 to 17 years. All but one is mixed, and the one single sex house is a small unit for older boys. Children over statutory school-leaving age may be continuing their education but many will have commenced employment and the majority have their first experience as workers while remaining in the same houses. This arrangement which began in 1960 has proved highly successful in bridging the gap between school and work.

STAFFING.

Each house is under the direction of a houseparent in charge. This officer may be the husband of a full time married couple, in one instance, the wife of a married couple where the husband follows his own occupation, but several are single women. Each is supported by a deputy houseparent and one or more assistant staff according to the size of the group. Houses for 13 children have a fixed staffing of three staff, who in most instances are supplemented by an additional half staff (a part-time, non-resident houseparent). This staffing ratio is considered to be inadequate and is at present under review. In addition each house has the entitlement of full-time domestic assistance and where possible, additional domestic help may be given to match the varying requirements of different houses. In addition there is a considerable supportive staff, needlewomen, gardeners, visiting teachers for leisure time groups, nurses, clerical officers etc. The total including many part-time workers, residents and non-residents numbers just over 200 people.

INTAKE.

At present Beechholme serves the London Boroughs of Wandsworth, Hammersmith, Camden, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the City of Westminster. Each of these five Boroughs has its quota of places within Beechholme, scattered throughout the houses and not confined to any particular house for any one borough. This arrangement ceased on the 1st January, 1973, when Wandsworth children only will be admitted. Children resident from sharing boroughs will remain until discharged. Children are either received into care under Section 1 of the Children Act or committed to care through the juvenile courts under a Care Order. The percentage of the latter fluctuates but is usually between 30 and 40% of the total. In 1954 the population was still as high as 464 but within a few years was reduced to 355. But 1966 saw it reduced effectively to between 250 and 300. The present maximum number is 200.

Immigrant children represent a high proportion of the population, being on average over 40% and in certain age groups, as high as 60% of the children. Although including some children from East and West Africa, India and Pakistan, the majority are from the West Indies though by no means all of these are first generation immigrants.

The reasons for admission to Beechholme cover the whole range experienced in an urban area; family breakdown; separation of parents; parental illness, frequently prolonged; occasionally homelessness and in many instances, a combination of many factors.

PLACEMENT.

The system of placement operates on a waiting list. Applications by social workers include a family background and relevant reports. An impending vacancy is discussed with houseparents to decide initially the sex and age of the child who will be most suitable to fit in to an existing group. The social worker concerned is invited to bring any child for whom a place may be offered on a preliminary visit. It is essential to allocate a child to a group with the utmost care. Consideration is given to the current state of the group, the kind of difficulties which its members present and not least, the very special skills which staff may have to offer in different directions. Success is not always achieved but at least in a children's community there is the possibility of finding a more suitable placement without the child having to change school, place of abode, friends, leisure time activities etc. In addition a number of emergency admissions are received, one house being reserved for short stay cases.

LEISURE.

The effective use of leisure is more than a means of keeping children out of mischief. It needs to be seen on three planes. Firstly within the house itself, both in small groups and as individuals. Secondly, it can be seen as a wide range of services provided communally within the campus. Thirdly, there is the opportunity for children and especially older children to join activities within the district. This last arrangement can assist in minimising the ever-present dangers in any institution of isolation.

Some community-based activities are provided. The Tavern, a club-room with a tea-bar built by the boys themselves may be used as a comfortable, civilised place where both young people and adults can meet and share light refreshments in a congenial atmosphere. Among the more constructive groups are the Woodworkers who built the Tavern and have

undertaken many other man-sized projects on behalf of the community. A cycle repair centre fulfils a vital need. The Printers, under the name of the Beechholme Press undertake commercial printing in a self-contained Company run by a teacher on premises provided by the Council. All the equipment, stock, etc., attached to the Press belongs to the group of boys and profits from the Company are shared out at twice yearly intervals.

It is important to emphasise that none of the last three groups is vocational in aim. Man-sized projects are basically educational. They also have considerable social value. The work they undertake can be of a very high standard. In addition to these there is the Photographic Club and a Pottery, to which must be added Dancing, Drama and Ballet Classes. Classes for Typing and Feltwork are in demand. Children and adults used to come together in the Chapel Choir and prepare anthems to be sung in parts for the major festivals of the Church year.

Although every encouragement is given to young people to take part in sport attached to their schools, there is an opportunity to raise football teams, the occasional cricket team, rounders teams, five-a-side football and a great deal of swimming for which the establishment is particularly fortunate in having an indoor bath. Here again contacts with the outside district are very much welcomed and a number of children belong to the Cheam Ladies' Swimming Club, a local club of national repute. Some have represented the club in their particular age group in competitive galas. Participation in local Road Safety competitions and Drama Festivals have been highly successful.

The whole basis of the leisure time programme which is organised by the Deputy Superintendent with a considerable team of visiting teachers and instructors, is to assist children and young people to see leisure as something worthwhile and enjoyable in itself, to glimpse the possibilities of success when much of their lives has been surrounded by failure. It is not aimed at containing them within the children's community and whenever possible every encouragement is given to participate outside on a wider basis.

EDUCATION.

Children under the age of five are able to make use of the Nursery Play Group which is run on nursery school lines. This is intended to provide an effective introduction to group activities and to more regular school attendance at the age of five. The Infants' department of the Primary

in common with the Junior department is specifically geared to the needs of children living away from home. The school is run by the Inner London Education Authority, has its own headmaster and separate teaching staff. The teacher-pupil ratio is unusually generous and rarely exceeds 20 pupils to one teacher. Some remedial teaching is needed since a great many children coming into care will register a poorer than average performance as a result of disturbing experiences prior to family breakdown or whatever circumstances resulted in their leaving home.

Children of secondary age go out to school. Beechholme has the use of many schools in the county of Surrey, the London Borough of Sutton and in several of the Inner London Boroughs. Where a child's stay is likely to be short and his previous school is available by train from Banstead, he remains in his old school so as to minimise the extent of the break. London schools are, however, used in addition for children requiring academic or other special courses and in this way it is possible to spread the load over a wide number of schools. Few have more than 8 or 10 children from Beechholme and this enables the children to be accepted in their own rights and minimises the danger of their forming minority groups within a school. This was the case when all were concentrated on two local schools.

There are, however, a number of children whose experiences have been so shattering as to render a normal school unsuitable. For these a first remedial course was set up in 1955 and the second in 1964. Many children have been persistent school refusers, others have demonstrated severe behaviour problems and not a few, although of average intelligence are non-readers at the beginning of their secondary school careers. At the present time we have only one remedial unit under an experienced teacher. This group requires firstly to restore hope in children who have become particularly hopeless in their attitude to learning and to school and then, whenever possible, to rehabilitate them to normal schooling as soon as they are able. A number of educationally subnormal children attend London E.S.N. primary and secondary schools and the majority of these are transported daily by coach from Banstead to their schools and collected in the afternoon. At a later stage, with some maturity and greater confidence, a few are able to travel by public transport and this represents a very real objective for them. In addition to the E.S.N. children a few also attend day-maladjusted schools in London, both by coach and on public transport.

CASEWORK.

The casework responsibility for each child is vested in the

social worker who as a member of a group of social workers under a senior officer operates from the Borough Social Work Department in the District to which the child's family belongs. It is hoped that the social worker will have known the family throughout the period while preventive work was being undertaken and will thus form a continuous caring link between the child and his family. It is realistic to say that just as residential staff change from time to time, so do the social workers concerned with the children. It is the responsibility of the field worker, however, in addition to other statutory duties, to visit the child in the children's Home and to work as part of a team with the houseparents, either towards the rehabilitation of the child and his family or in the making of the most suitable plans for his future. A high level of co-operation between social worker and residential worker is essential. The field officer naturally is also in touch with the child's parents and, here too, the residential worker has a part to play. Inasmuch as parents visit frequently, and are encouraged to do so, there is also considerable support given to parents by the residential officers.

Case conferences are called whenever necessary. A visiting psychiatrist does a session each week and an educational psychologist is available to come when required. Each family's affairs are reviewed at least once every six months and a standard pattern of documentation is prepared as a result of these review conferences to ensure a continuous record of a child's progress. In addition, houseparents prepare a quarterly report on each child and endeavour to note at regular intervals particular items of interest which could be used as the basis of these reports.

The aim of a social work department is to prevent children from coming into care and to avoid family breakdown by giving such support as can be provided under the 1963 Children and Young Persons Act. When, however, this fails, the object is to obtain whenever necessary through the use of the reception centre, accurate diagnosis of the child's problems so that the most suitable placement in either a foster home or residential care can be arranged. The final objective is rehabilitation. Continued support can be given to assist a family to maintain itself as an entity in its own place. The total emphasis is on the needs of the child as a member of a family.

TRAINING.

At the time of the passing of the Children Act in 1948, specific training for the Child Care Service was virtually non-existent. Since that time there have been extensive developments. For social workers there exist post-graduate professional courses available in many University departments

and, in addition, more prolonged training courses of various kinds for mature students with suitable background and qualifications. For residential workers, one year courses organised by the Central Training Council at the Home Office have been available since 1949. These lead to the Certificate in the Residential Care of Children. In addition an advanced course is offered at the Universities of Bristol and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Even after almost twenty years only a small proportion of residential workers are fully qualified, although Beechholme has rather more than the national average of persons with the Residential Care Certificate. Beechholme was, however, one of the pioneers in the field of introductory in-service training. Short intensive introductory courses were begun in 1957. Similar but longer courses have now been available on a national level since 1967 and a great many Social Work Departments are organising In-Service Study Courses based on an approved guide syllabus published by the Central Training Council in Child Care. Wandsworth has its own staff training centre at Beechholme where up to 10 students at a time undertake a three month block period of training followed by a further three months of day-release study which leads to the Certificate of Attendance awarded by the Home Office. Those courses have led to a considerable emphasis within the children's community on training. Lectures and discussion groups are held for all staff throughout the autumn and spring terms. Study groups to investigate specific projects and problems are set up from time to time. In this way it is hoped that staff can be involved in examining the day to day problems of residential care and assist in planning realistically for its future.

GENERAL.

In many ways Beechholme is something of an anachronism. Its capacity to house in scattered groups up to 200 children makes it one of the largest groupings of children in care in the country and no-one today will subscribe to a community as large as this. Plans for the future included drastic reduction in size and only the severe pressure on places in the London area has hampered this movement. The operative total population at the beginning of 1968 was about 275 but the opportunity to reduce this considerably will depend on the establishment of new children's homes and hostels throughout the sharing boroughs. The emphasis today is less and less on custodial care although there are still a number of children needing long-term care whose past experiences and emotional condition will still render fostering an unsuitable arrangement. Nevertheless the trend is toward treatment and although this represents more of a future aim than a present achievement it is the direction in which we are seeking

to move. As preventive work becomes more effective and as assessment procedures provide more accurate diagnosis, the numbers of children requiring residential care may be considerably fewer. They will, however, present more difficult problems and will undoubtedly prove to be more resistant to the form of environmental therapy which we offer at the present time. Residential work with children is essentially group work and many of the uses currently made of group techniques are intuitive. Increasingly the training courses of the future will have to prepare the residential social worker in the use of group techniques in a truly scientific manner. Only then will residential work cease to be mainly custodial and even the best environmental therapy will be seen as only one part of the treatment process. To make this an effective reality however, field work techniques will also have to be developed to a comparable extent.

This is a far cry from the rigid institution of 50 years ago. The idea of a "family" group technique has however survived. Its usefulness is now being challenged. Houseparents are no longer "playing" at being parents and the "family" is scarcely a family any more. As ever the future will need to take what is valid from the past and adapt to constantly changing needs. If the truth be told, however, this is precisely what has been happening ever since the dramatic days of 1880.

The plan for the future is replacement by purpose-built houses in the Borough of Wandsworth. Following a deal with a firm of property developers this has now reached an advanced stage. If all goes to plan Beechholme will cease to exist by the spring of 1974.

