

PLANTING SEEDS REFORMING JUVENILE DELINQUENTS

Dan Wale

James Andrews was born in Herefordshire in 1862. Aged twenty-five he started working as an assistant at the farm, in Bordesley Green, operated as part of Saltley Reformatory, near Birmingham. Normally details of such lives are lost to history but his diary for the year 1905–1906 has survived and through the generosity of his family who have made it available for study, and shared their recollections and some photographs, it has been possible to provide an insight into this unique farm.

Opened in 1853, for the detention of delinquent boys, Saltley Reformatory initially accommodated twenty-five but was progressively expanded, housing 100 by 1860. It originated in a cottage in Edgbaston, rented by local philanthropist Joseph Sturge, offering accommodation to local boys following completion of their jail sentences. Demand was strong and Charles Adderley, later Lord Norton, offered a purpose-built establishment on a five-acre site he owned at Saltley, two miles east of Birmingham.

Agricultural Labour as Reform

The reformatory provided school instruction and training in shoemaking and tailoring as well as land work. To reduce running costs the institution tried to grow as much of its own food as possible and Hugh Humphries, its superintendent from 1857 to 1881, declared agricultural labour was a means for the 'moral discipline' of the boys. Also favouring the 'assisted emigration' of criminal children, which allowed them to settle abroad, he noted such work was particularly useful to this end. It was probably also recognised that such tiring physical work gave the inmates less energy to expend on disruptive behaviour. In 1869, it was decided to expand the agricultural work considerably and forty-five acres were purchased for £4500. Located a mile away, this became the reformatory farm.



A benefactor of Saltley Reformatory . *Charles Bower Adderley (1814–1905), 1st Lord Norton* by George Percy Jacomb-Hood, 1891.

James Andrews as Bailiff

When, in 1890, the existing farm bailiff resigned, the superintendent, Harry Fish, immediately recommended James for the post. Obviously highly regarded, he was described as a 'highly respectable, steady young man'. Fish noted how James was engaged to a most respectable young woman, deemed to be 'very suitable' as a wife.

He was subsequently appointed as bailiff with a starting salary of twenty-two shillings per week, increasing by one shilling a week annually, and use of a farm cottage. James clearly excelled in the role, and within weeks the reformatory's management committee reported him as giving 'entire satisfaction'. He did, however, take a little time off, returning to Herefordshire to marry his fiancée Bessie at St. David's Church, Much Dewchurch.

Farming for Boys

As bailiff, his days commenced by collecting the boys from the reformatory and marching them to the farm. Usually approximately thirty boys would work there, though this increased to nearer seventy at harvest times. The diary illustrates the surprisingly wide variety of produce derived from the farm. They bred cows and pigs,

operated their own dairy and also kept horses. Piglets and calves were also purchased separately to be 'fatted up' and then sold on.

The farm was divided into several fields where a wide variety of crops were grown. Mangolds, vetches and clover were amongst those produced for animal feed and rhubarb, peas, oats, potatoes, swedes, cabbages and wheat were grown for human consumption. Highlighting a commercial side to the farm, most crops were produced in quantities far larger than could be consumed at the reformatory.

The potatoes, the favoured variety being Duke of York, were sold by the ton, hundred-weight or cart load, to over twenty different customers. Depending on their size and quality, a hundred-weight could be purchased for two-and-a-half shillings but, like any other farm, its income was affected by price fluctuations and disease. James recalled how the value of the pea crop varied from £14 in 1893 to £103 in 1898.

However, 1905 yielded a successful harvest, valued at £795.

Machinery was brought in to help gather the wheat, producing seventy-seven sacks in one day, which left James remarking on its speed. Most was immediately sold on to a local mill. Over the space of two days, in August, the boys picked 111 pots of peas, with a further fifty-eight being collected later that month. Some were purchased by local shops, as were fifty hundred-weight of swedes that were bought by one customer alone.

Other Activities

James' duties were not completely restricted to the farm. He took the boys to visit local agricultural shows and teams played cricket and football against other local reformatory and industrial schools. He also accompanied boys to Liverpool and saw them onto the boats that would take them to their new lives abroad.

Though the main reformatory employed a gardener, James was

responsible for purchasing the flowers and seeds that were planted in the grounds. There are records of him ordering hundreds of carnations, asters, sweet peas, chrysanth and violas. He even employed two of his sons to collect cuttings at the Small Heath flower show. They must have provided a blaze of colour, contrary to the dour image of such establishments.

Underlining the

nature of the institution, if James or his wife ever left their kitchen unattended it had to be locked and visitors were always told to keep their belongings within sight, otherwise 'inquisitive hands' would soon appear, searching for items to pilfer. Discipline was strict and children caught eating any of the crops were punished. He had other daily challenges.

The diary notes people stealing from the fields, and livestock from one particular neighbouring farm were regularly found amongst the crops. Despite this, there is no indication of any bad feeling: in fact the boys undertook work for the farmer concerned. Their labour was also put to use locally at Saltley Church and Saltley College.

The diary also records the deaths of Lords Norton (whose memorial at Saltley Church James attended) and Leigh. Both were instrumental in the establishment and running of Saltley, as well as several other local reformatories, and campaigned nationally for the more humane treatment of juvenile criminals.



Boys at work on a reformatory farm at Weston-under-Wetherley, Warwickshire. From *The Annual Report of the Warwickshire Reformatory Institutions*, 1909.

Warwickshire County Record Office collections: C.364, WAR(P).



Courtesy Mrs Bessie Evans

The annual gathering of boys and staff from the reformatory at Lord Norton's Hams Hall home, 1903-04. James Andrews is standing on the left with his hands on his hips.

The diary records how one tradition started by Norton continued after his death. From the earliest days of the reformatory he hosted an annual day out for the boys and officers at his Hams Hall home. An eagerly awaited event by all accounts, it was said that threats to exclude errant boys usually prompted an immediate improvement in their behaviour. However, tragedy struck in 1885 when a boy drowned. In a typical act, Norton paid for his headstone.

Despite progressive legislation it was down to the abilities of people like James, who had daily contact with the children, to prevent them from falling into a life of crime. An account from 1908 praises his abilities as a teacher and farm manager. He clearly made a positive impression as there are frequent mentions of his name in the letters many boys sent to the reformatory following their release.

James Andrews' Later Life

James' first wife Bessie died in 1912 but he always counted himself fortunate, particularly because their four sons all served in, and survived, the First World War. However, one son, Herbert, was gassed and subsequently invalided out of the army and another son, Donald, developed epilepsy which was attributed to his experiences

in the trenches. Nearly 400 'old boys' from Saltley served in the conflict. Fifty-one died and 113 were injured. Eight were honoured for bravery.

James retired in the early 1920s and moved to Dorlcote Road, Alum Rock, where he subsequently remarried. There are stories that he developed the habit of sitting on a barrel, in the doorway of his garden shed, shouting orders to his wife; the neighbours then chimed in with their suggestions of what she should tell him to do with the instructions! Despite this he is remembered as being strict but kind. He was popular with local children and would always have some sweets in his pockets for them. Even though they were usually coated with the tobacco he also kept there, no one seemed to mind. ●

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Further Reading

J.A. Hitchens, *Birmingham Reformatory Institution (Saltley Reformatory) Jubilee Retrospect, 1903* (Hall & English (Printers), 1903).

Records of the Birmingham Reformatory Institution/Saltley Reformatory are held in the Library of Birmingham under the general reference MS 244.

The diary itself can be examined at the Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections, University of Birmingham (Reference: MS 870).