

# The Farningham Band - Home for Little Boys, Kent

*Gavin Holman, 5 March 2025*

The Farningham Home for Little Boys was founded in 1863, by three London philanthropists - W.H. Williams, Robert Culling Hanbury (MP for Middlesex) and Rev. A.O. Charles. At first it was housed in a disused poorhouse in Tottenham, but these premises were soon outgrown, and a purpose-built 'home' was built near Farningham in Kent, consisting of a number of cottages to house destitute boys. The first five of these were opened and occupied in 1867. Each cottage had up to 30 boys together with house 'parents'. The boys were trained in the various crafts of agriculture, baking, bootmaking, carpentry, printing, tailoring, engineering, gardening, and laundry work.

The Farningham Boys' Band was formed in the early 1880s and, by 1886, had commenced its activity of touring the country – to raise funds and promote the Home. The band's touring only ceased in 1914 with the start of the First World War.



One of the visitors to the Home, Mr H.A. Page, wrote about the home in "The Sunday Magazine" and his report was subsequently published as a booklet.

“It was past mid-day when we mounted the rather steep road up the hill on which the colony is situated; and we had soon to acknowledge to ourselves that we had come to the right place for fresh air. But, though the wind was rather keen, the little band in uniform that fronted us as we turned in at the gate, showed no depression as they beat time, or marched with military air to the sound of their own music. Neat, well-equipped, brave-looking, little fellows, some of them not more than nine or ten; and there they were, finished instrumentalists - one especially, a flute-player, would have stood comparison with some adult professionals in London orchestras. As we stood listening for a little while beside them, we had time to observe the inscriptions on some of the buildings, and to read on some of the music-frames, "Home for Little Boys"; so that now our readers may know where we are, and accompany us with the more pleasure on our round.”<sup>1</sup>

The band did not restrict its performances and travelling to nearby locations, as did several other similar orphanage bands. Indeed, they criss-crossed the country from northern Scotland to south-west England. In each location they would take collections to raise funds for the Home,



One of their first tours was to Scotland, for a full month in September 1886, accompanied by Rev. A.O. Charles, the Home's secretary. In total the band received £631 in concert takings, and they only had to pay for two meals in the entire tour. The towns visited, not in order, were: Aberdeen (2 concerts), Arbroath, Banff, Brechin, Cupar, Dingwall, Dundee, Dunoon (2), Edinburgh (2), Elgin, Forfar, Forres, Fraserburgh (2), Glasgow, Helensburgh, Inverness (2), Kirkaldy, Macduff, Montrose, Nairn (2), Oban, Peterhead (2), Rothesay (2), and St Andrews.<sup>2</sup>

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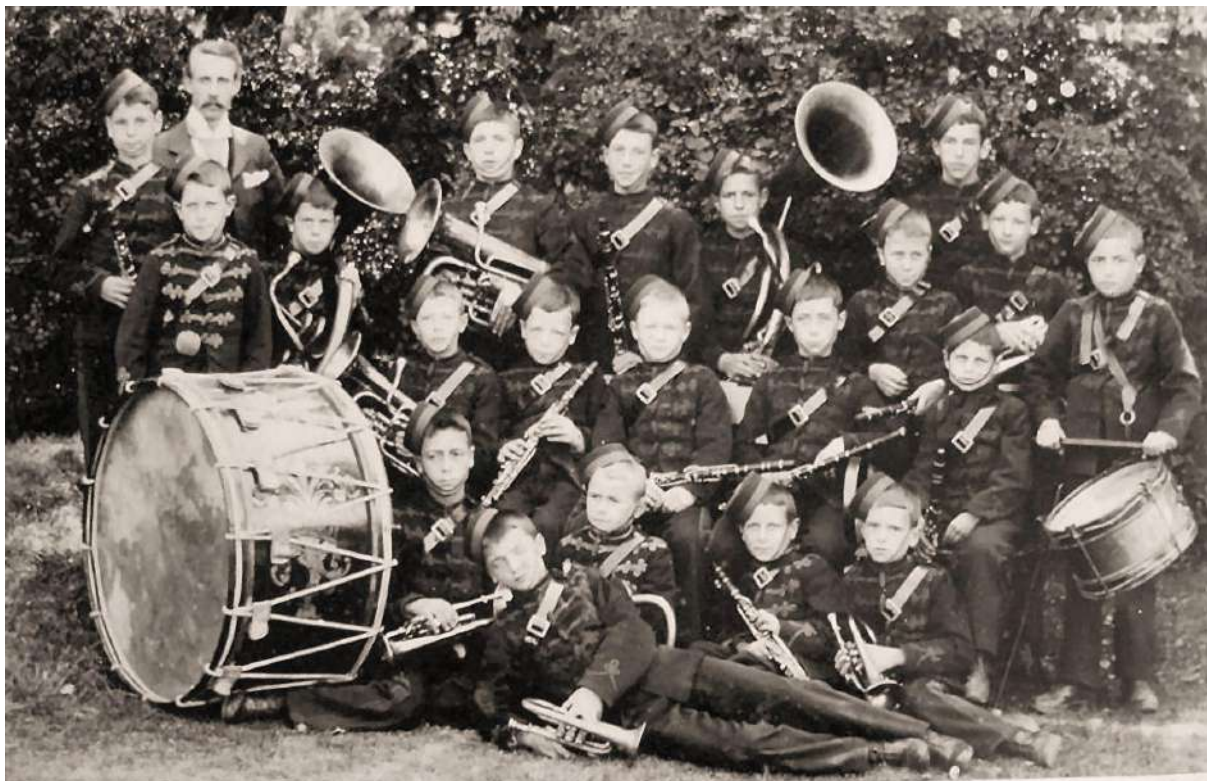
<sup>1</sup> Page, H.A. – *A Pleasant Home in Kent* – Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1886

<sup>2</sup> Peterhead Sentinel and General Advertiser for Buchan District, 13 October 1886

May 1887 saw the band spending a week at Aberystwyth, giving three concerts on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup>.

The band travelled to the north-west in May 1888, performing in Cockermouth, Keswick, Workington, Wigton and Maryport. The boys of the band were usually provided with comfortable beds and meals, being distributed among several local houses which had offered to look after them.

In September 1888 the band moved across the Pennines to give two concerts in Jarrow on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup>, under the leadership of Mr E.C.F. Hare. The next day they performed at all three services in the Jarrow Wesleyan Church. The next week they gave a concert at Blyth Central Hall, at which the audience crammed the hall to such an extent that there was a severe crush as they attempted to leave once the band had played "*God Save the Queen*".<sup>3</sup>



THE FARNINGHAM BAND.  
*The Homes for Little Boys, Farningham and Swanley, Kent.*

The band travelled all the way to the south-west, appearing at the Coffee Tavern Hall, Totnes, Devon on Monday 15 October 1888, in two concerts.

In 1889 the band toured the midlands, with concerts in Nottingham on Monday 8 July, two concerts in Melton Mowbray on Friday 19 July. Later, in August, they travelled to Scotland, performing in Alloa on Thursday 22 August, and Dalkeith on Friday 23. The band was accompanied by Mr Benjamin Clarke, the secretary, and Mr Sparrow, the bandmaster, and were outfitted with a dark uniform with yellow braid. The afternoon concert in Alloa included "*Let the Hills Resound*" (Richards), "*Forget-*

<sup>3</sup> Blyth News, 15 September 1888

*Me-Not*, “*Fra Diavola*”, “*Airs of Merrie England*”, “*The Morning Glory*”, and “*Old Maids*”. In the evening they performed: march “*Joy Bells*” (E. Hare), overture “*L’Italiani in Algieri*” (Rossini), fantasia “*Bonnie Scotland*” (E. Hare), selection “*Bohemian Girl*” (Balfe), valse “*Fairie Voices*” (Crewe), descriptive “*The Smithy in the Wood*” (Michaelis).<sup>4</sup>

Further appearances in 1889 included Penryn, on 17 October, Bournemouth on 16 November, Christchurch on 19 November, Ryde on 23 November, and Petersfield on 28 November. The collections for the band in Christchurch totalled £17 9s 8½d, compared to £16 5s 10d, when the band visited Christchurch in 1887. The concert in Ryde, at the Town Hall, conducted by Mr Bates, included: “*Priest’s March*”, glee “*Hail Smiling Morn*”, selection “*Les Huguenots*”, fantasia “*Bonnie Scotland*”, valse “*Myosotis*”, and gavotte “*Melita*”.

On Saturday 11 January 1890, the boys’ band performed in the Royal Albert Hall, London, with the Swanley Orphans’ Choir. Nearly 500 boys from the homes also attended. Later, in early February, the band played at a ‘*conversazione*’ at the Mansion House, London, under the auspices of the Lord and Lady Mayor of London.

Further performance dates in their tours during 1890 included Tuesday 18 February, at the Mechanics’ Hall, Rotherham; Wednesday 19 February at Montgomery Hall, Sheffield; Tuesday 25 February, at the Town Hall, Skipton; Tuesday 22 April, at the Newport Pagnell Public Room; Wednesday 23 April, at Daventry; Friday 2 May, at the Corn Exchange, Northampton; Saturday 17 May, at the Hotel Metropole, Faversham, at the Homes’ 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary banquet; Monday 26 May, marching in the Barnsley Sunday School Union Demonstration; Wednesday 28 May, at the Drill Hall, Carlisle; Friday 30 May, at Penrith.

The Sheffield concerts included: march “*Let the Hills Resound*” (Richards), glee “*Chough and Crow*” (Bishop), selection “*Fra Diavolo*” (Auber), selection “*Yeomen of the Guard*” (Sullivan), valse “*Venitia*” (C. Lowthian), and polka “*Old Maids*” (Pierrot).

The boys’ band continued to perform and tour periodically throughout the 1890s and, less frequently, in the 1900s. The last known appearance of the band was in 1913.

These cottage homes were not built and run by the local Poor Law Union but by a group of individuals, and they did not come under state control until 1952. There were 11 houses in all, accommodating more than 300 boys. The homes eventually closed in 1961 with the buildings being used for the North Downs Approved School.

### **Further reading:**

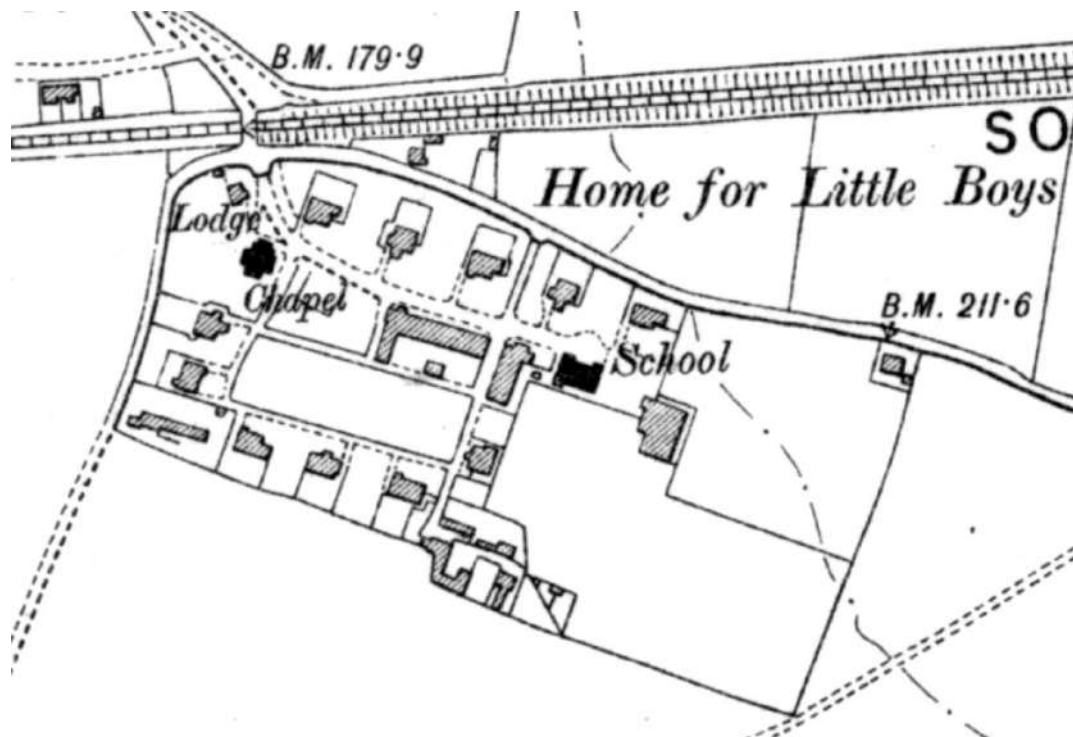
- Anon - Farningham Home for Little Boys – *Bygone Kent* – Issue 18, pp. 3-9
- Anon - Farningham Home for Little Boys – *Bygone Kent* – Issue 21, pp. 469-471
- Anon - Farningham Home for Little Boys – *The Southern Way* – Issue 20, 2012, pp. 50-51

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<sup>4</sup> Alloa Advertiser, 24 August 1889

- Jenkins, James - *The Farningham Home for Little Boys* - Horton Kirby and South Darenth Local History Society
- Page, H.A. – *A Pleasant Home in Kent* – Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1886
- Roast, Patrick - *A City Set on a Hill: Memories of a Childhood at the Farningham Homes for Little Boys*. ISBN 978-1527224650

## Appendix – some views of the band and the homes



Map of the homes - 1909



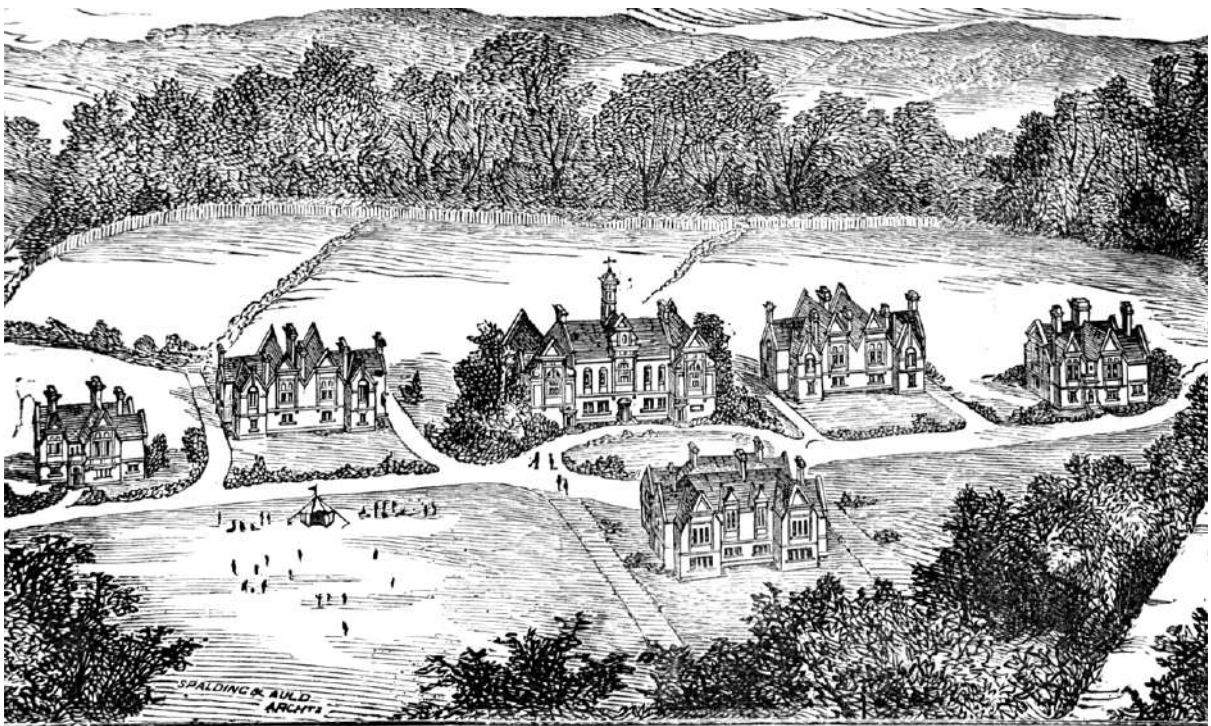
THE FARNINGHAM BAND.  
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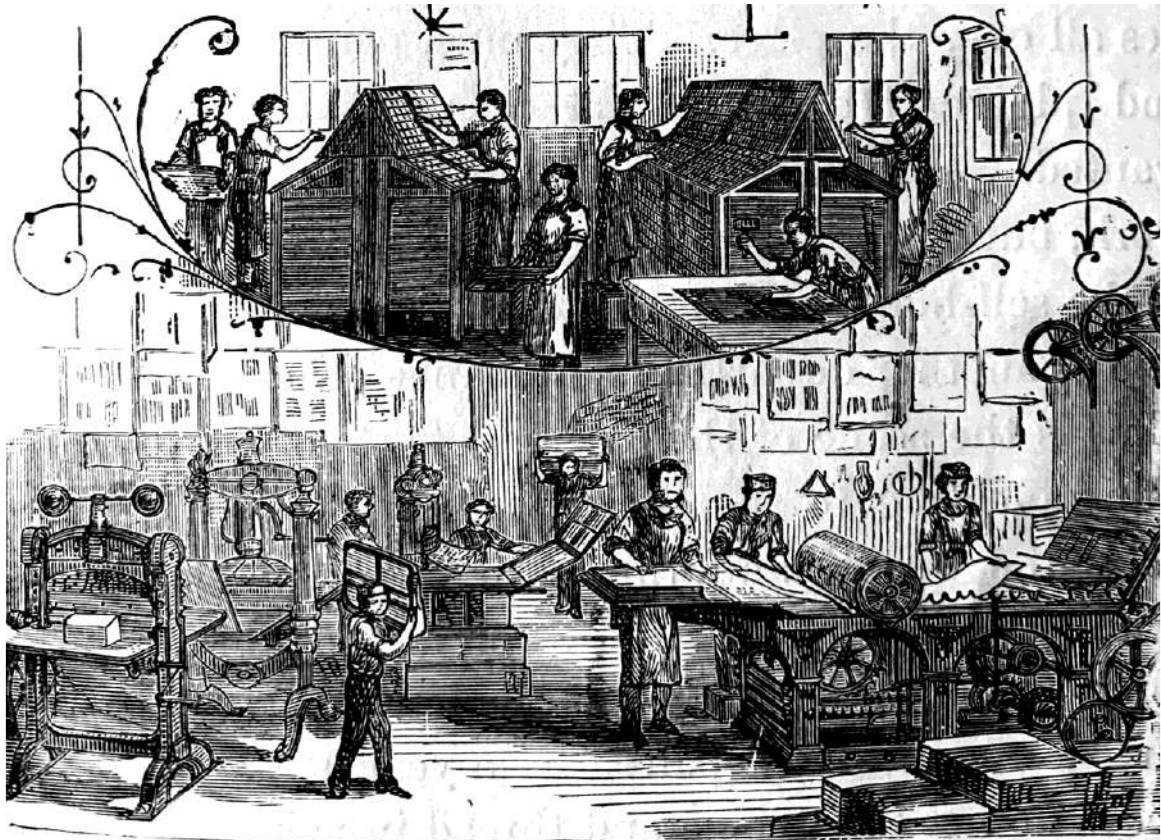
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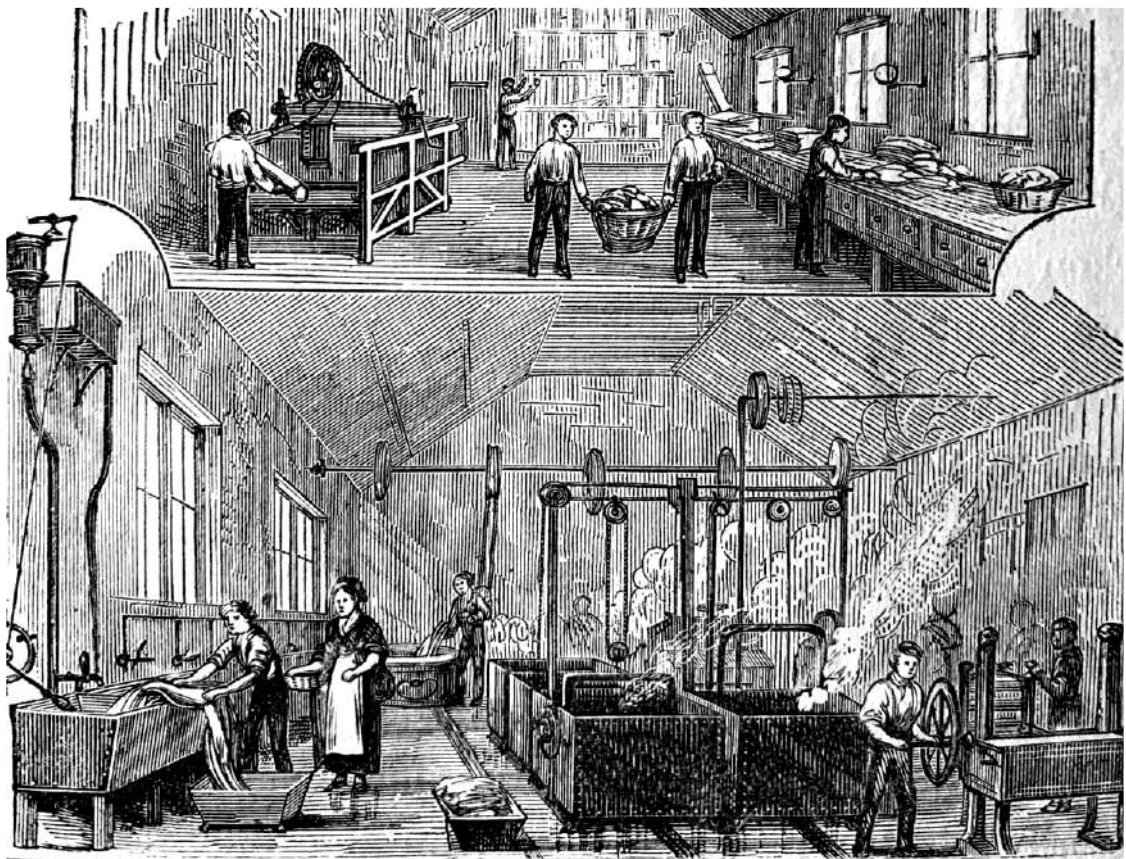
*The cottage homes from the air*



THE ORPHAN HOMES AT SWANLEY.

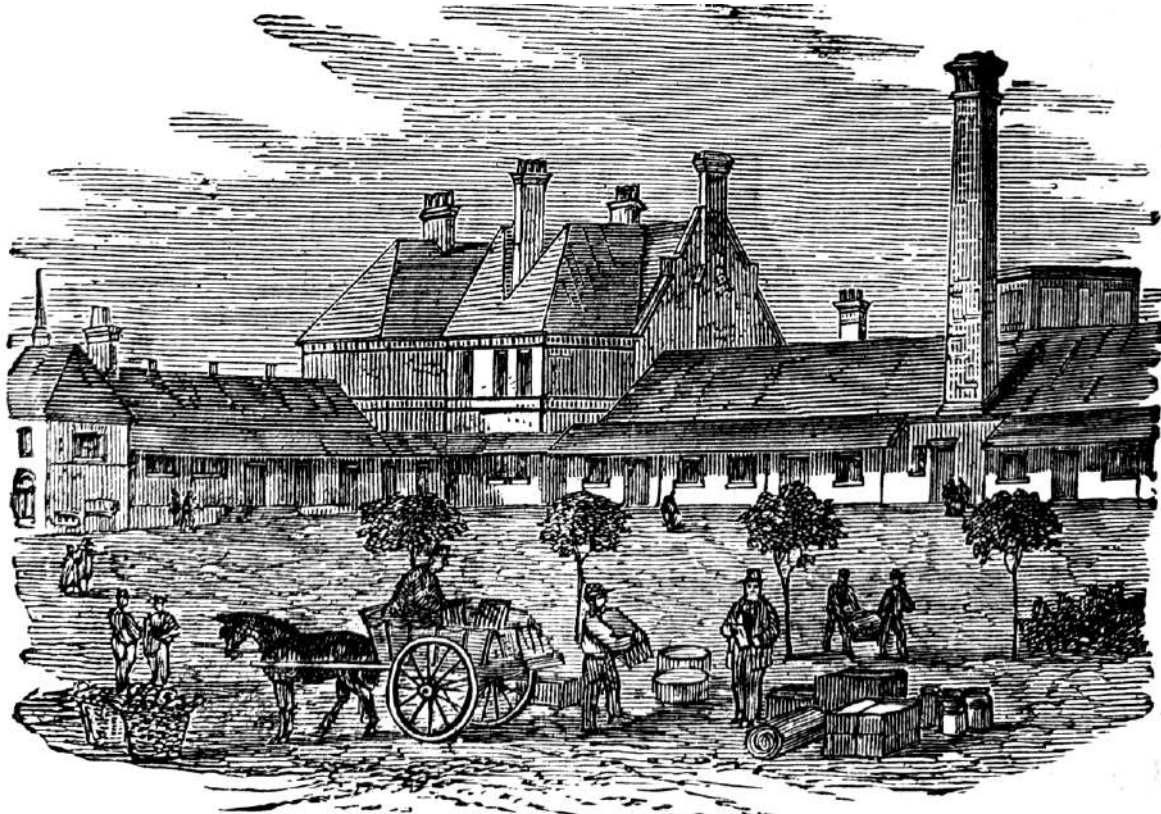


THE PRINTING OFFICE.

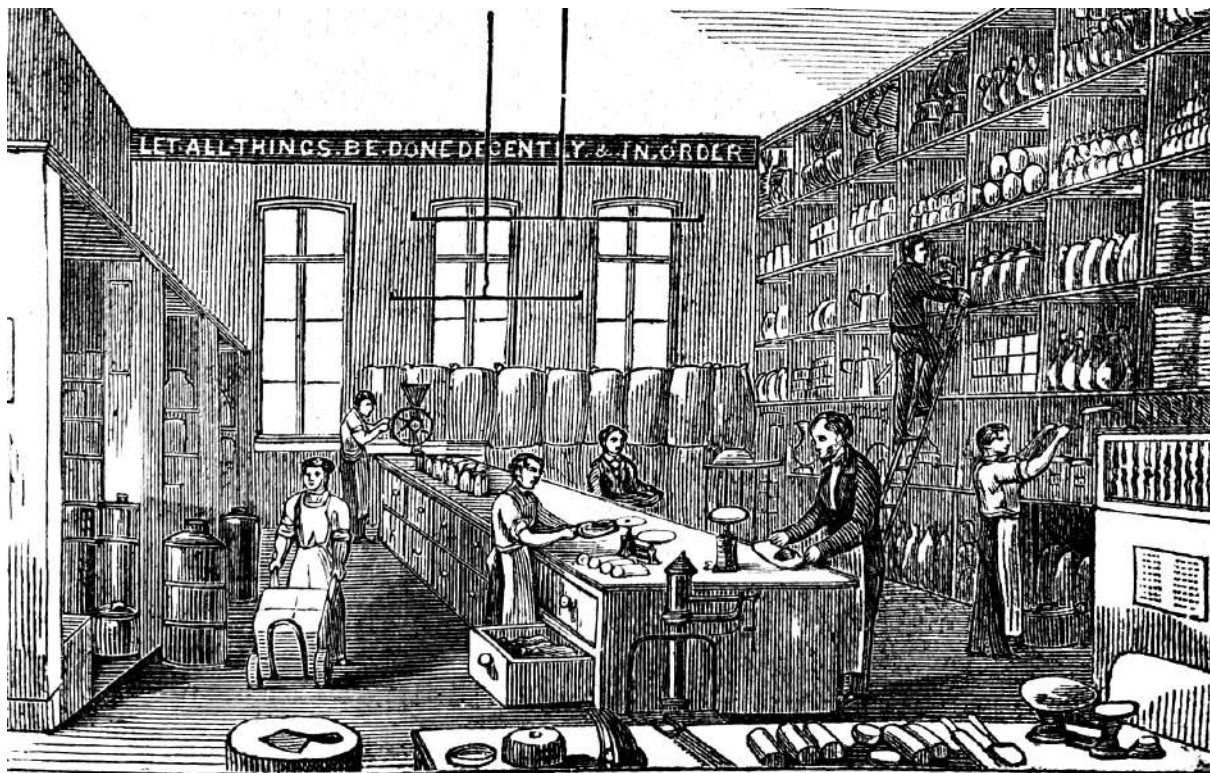


THE LAUNDRY.

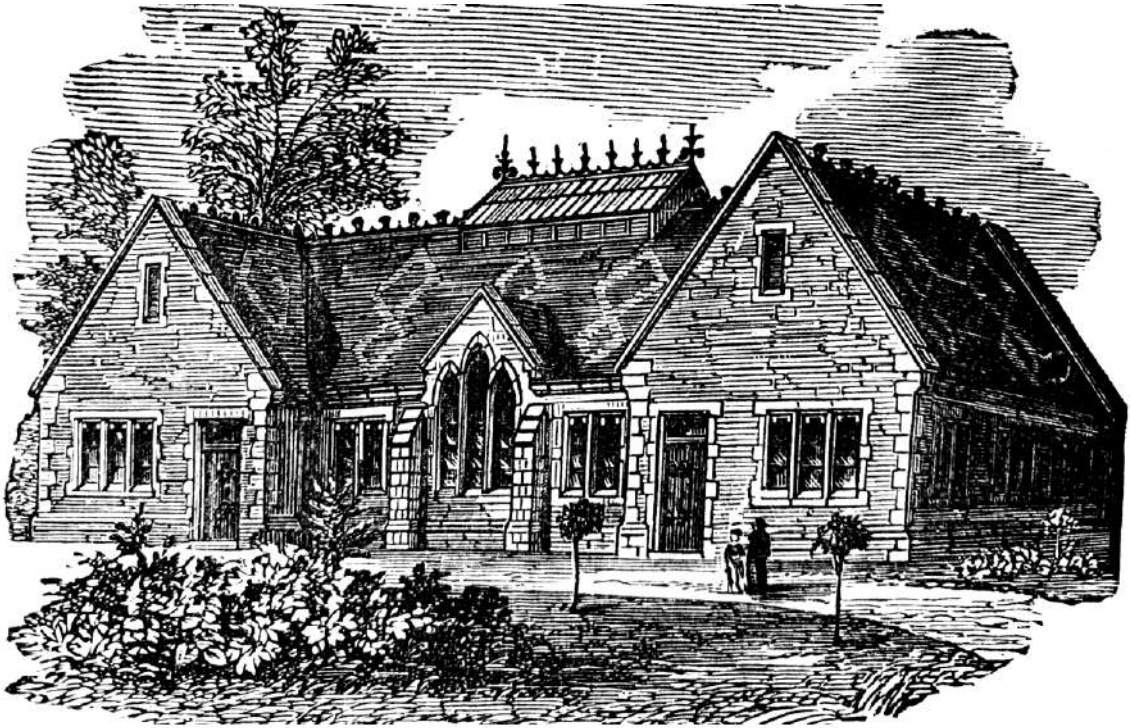




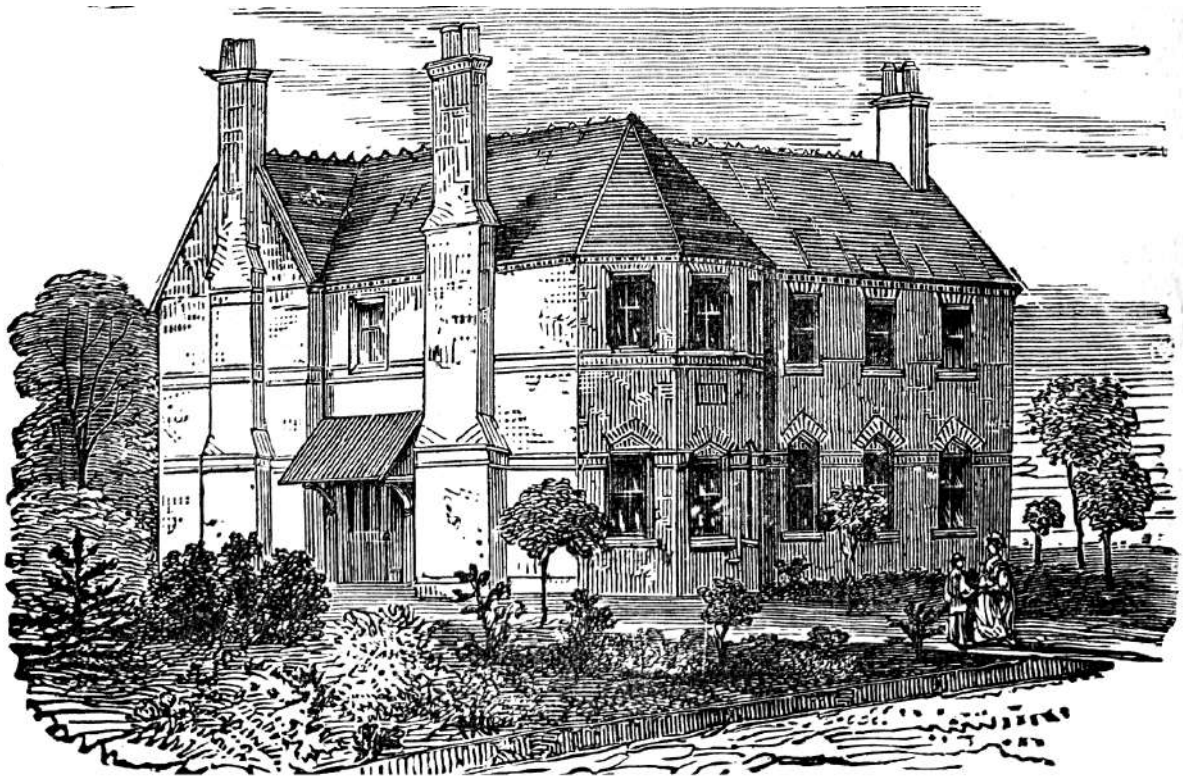
THE CENTRE OF INDUSTRY.



THE STORES.



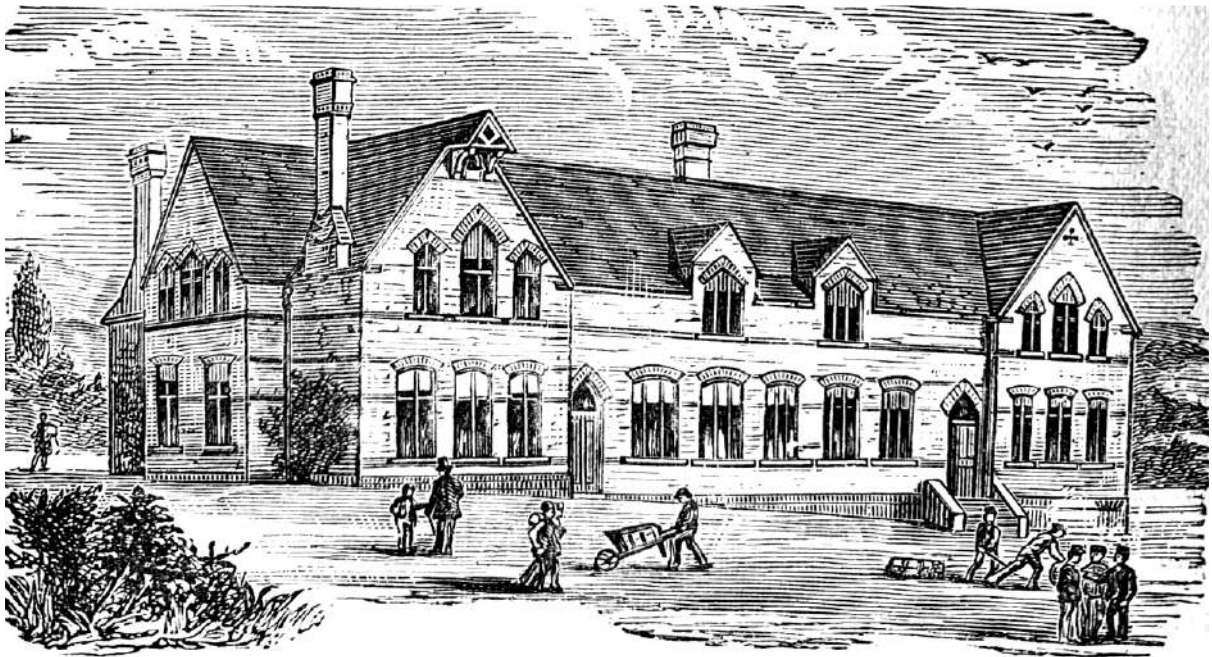
THE BRADFORD SCHOOL.



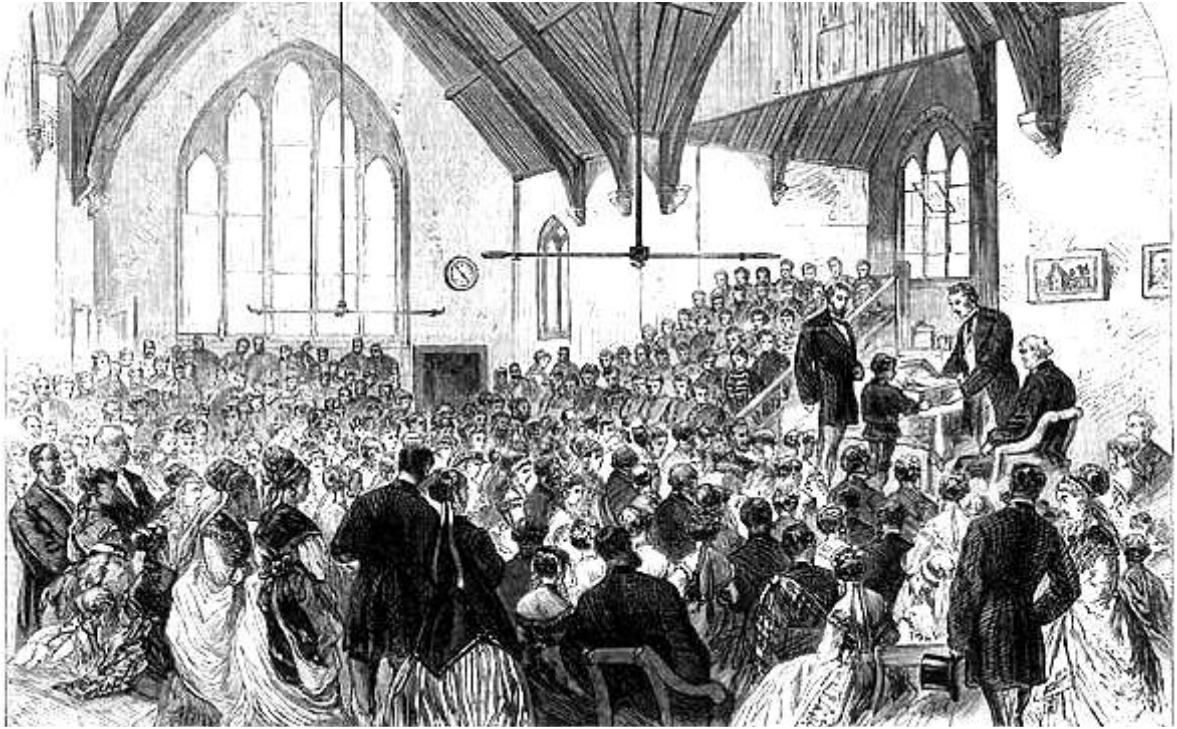
THE CHILDREN'S COTTAGE.



THE READING ROOM.



THE WORKSHOPS AND STORES.



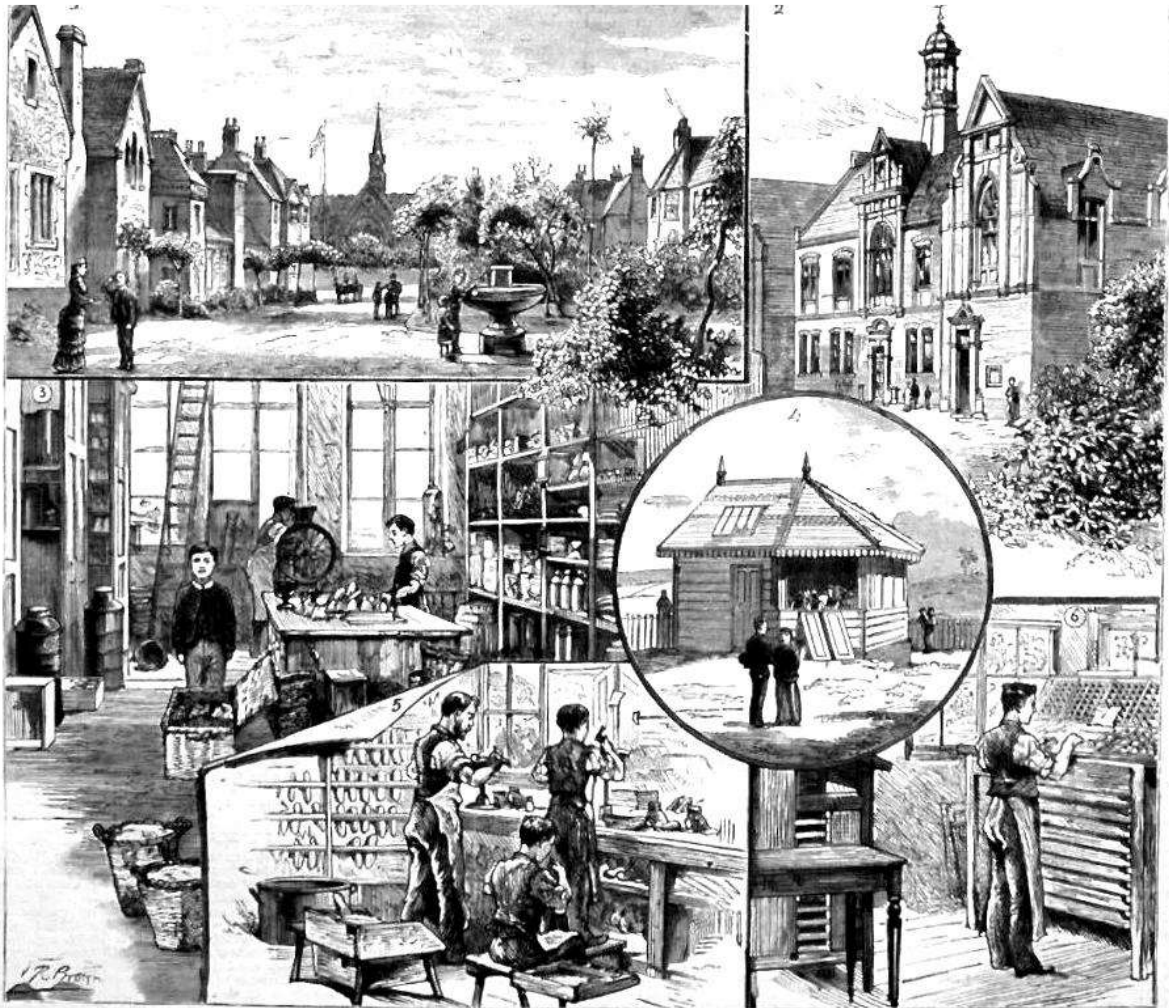
*Summer fete at the home, 1868*



**THE FAMILY AT DINNER.**



THE OLD BOYS' LODGE.



1. The Boys' Village, Farningham.—2. The New Building at Swanley.—3. The Stores, Farningham.—4. The Band Room, Farningham.—5. Shoemakers.—6. The Little Boys' Composing Room, Farningham.

# The Homes for Little Boys Farningham & Swanley, Kent (Incorporated)

*Patrons*—THEIR MAJESTIES THE KING AND QUEEN.

*President*—H.R.H. THE DUKE OF YORK, K.G., K.T.

*Past President*—THE MARQUIS OF ABERDEEN AND TEMAIR, K.T.

*Chairman and Treasurer*—EDWARD DEXTER, Esq.

## FORM OF APPLICATION

FOR THE ADMISSION OF A BOY TO

### THE COTTAGE HOMES AT FARNINGHAM.

- 1. Objects.** THE object of the Institution is to feed, clothe, educate, and train to industrial work, homeless and destitute little boys, whether orphans or not, who are disqualified by poverty, the receipt of parish relief, or other circumstances, for admission to Orphan Asylums or other Institutions.
- 2. Modes of Admission.** Admission is either by *Election of the Executive Committee of the Homes* or by *Payment* :—

  - 1. Elections.** In cases of extreme destitution the Committee may decide to elect the boy for free maintenance and education in the Homes.  
Elections are held half-yearly on the third Thursday in June and December. The successful candidates are received as soon as there are vacancies. Candidate's names cannot appear on the next list unless they are approved by the Committee not later than at the April or October meeting preceeding.
  - 2. Full Payment.** Where, in the opinion of the Committee, the circumstances of the case warrant it, payment shall be made at the rate of the average cost per boy for the last twelve months. For the year 1928-29 the cost was £65.
  - 3. Part Payment** of the nominal sum of £7 10s. per quarter.
- 3. Irregular Cases.** Many cases are deemed by the Committee to be eligible for admission on Payment, but not for Election. Illegitimate boys are included in this class. Each case is carefully considered on its own merits, and the application should not be withheld because some details seem to be irregular.
- 4. Temporary Payment.** When a boy has been approved for Election, he may be admitted on Payment of 12/- a week if there be a vacancy, pending his Election. By this means admission is secured at once, and when elected the boy is retained Free.
- 5. Instructions to fill up Form.** The annexed forms should be carefully filled up. The "form of recommendation" should be signed by some responsible person who can vouch for the facts concerning the boy. The form of "guarantee for payment" must also be signed by some responsible person, and is, of course, only required in the case of those to be admitted on payment. The form "guarantee for removal" must be signed in all cases, whether for Election or Payment, and must be by some person deemed suitable by the Committee. The form "guarantee as to disposal" may be signed by the boy's father or mother, if still alive and address known, or by the nearest known relative ; failing either, by any person whose guarantee can be accepted as guardian for the boy. It is earnestly requested that the full details be given, and especially the grounds upon which it is desirable for the boy to enter the Home.
- 6. Training and Disposal of Boys.** All boys admitted, whether by Election or by Payment, are lodged, clothed, fed, educated and trained to industrial work. They leave the Homes between the ages of fourteen and nineteen years. Special circumstances, however, may render their removal necessary before that age, or that they should be retained for a longer period. During the latter period of the time they are entirely employed in industrial work, and are afterwards placed in situations, whenever practicable. The Committee do not guarantee to find situations ; but where they are willing and able to do so, it must be understood that the disposal of the boy is left entirely and unreservedly in their hands.  
A separate paper, giving rules as to visiting the boys, and other matters affecting them after their admission, may be had at the Homes.
- 7. Enquiries about Boys.** All communications respecting the Admission of Boys should be addressed to the Secretary at the London Offices. Enquiries about the boys, after admission, and requests for orders to visit them should be addressed to "The Superintendent, Homes for Little Boys, South Darenth, Dartford, Kent."

# THE HOMES FOR LITTLE BOYS,

Farningham and Swanley, Kent.  
(Incorporated)

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## CERTIFICATE BY PARENT OR GUARDIAN AS TO HABITS.

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I certify that.....

is not of dirty habits or in the habit of wetting his bed,  
and I fully understand that should he prove to be of such  
habits during the first six months he is in the Homes he will  
be returned to me.

Signature of Parent (or Guardian)

.....

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### GUARANTEE FOR PAYMENT.

*To be filled up by some responsible person (not a parent or other relative of the boy.)*

I hereby guarantee that the undermentioned sum shall be paid as long as the boy remains in the Homes ;  
also the cost of an outfit on his leaving. (For particulars of outfit see next page.)

*Note. If less than full payment of  
£7.10 per quarter is offered  
for the boy, please insert here the  
amount per week as stated in  
paragraph 11, on opposite page*

1. ~~£16:16~~ per quarter (paid quarterly in advance)  
2. £7 10s. od. per quarter (paid quarterly in advance)  
3. £ : : per week (paid in advance)

*Please cross out what does not apply.*

Name .....  
Please write Title, Mr., Mrs., Miss, etc.

Name of Witness .....  
Please write Title, Mr., Mrs., Miss, etc.

Occupation .....

Occupation .....

Address .....

Address .....

Date ..... 19

Date ..... 19

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### GUARANTEE FOR REMOVAL.

*This form must be filled up in every case, but not by the boy's relative.*

I hereby guarantee to remove this boy from the Home at any time, if required to do so by the  
Committee.

Name .....  
Please write Title, Mr., Mrs., Miss, etc.

Name of Witness .....  
Please write Title, Mr., Mrs., Miss, etc.

Occupation .....

Occupation .....

Address .....

Address .....

Date ..... 19

Date ..... 19