

Ribble - A Lasting Legacy

Skills Training and Social Enterprise



1859 - 2009



www.kibble.org

Introduction

Kibble provided skills training for the boys in its care from its earliest days. According to Kibble's first full Trustees' Report, dated April 6th 1861, at that time boys were trained in shoemaking, tailoring and gardening. A key aim from the outset was, then, not merely to punish the boys who were committed here but to help equip them with skills that would enable them to live independently when they left.



Trades Training

The 1861 Report states that the boys of the institution had carried out all the levelling, road making, digging and trenching of the grounds, assisted by the gardener. Finding very early on that it was impossible to employ all the boys at outdoor labour and that 'the ages of many precluded such employment', a tailor was engaged on 1st October 1859 and a workshop was fitted up. The Trustees were 'happy to observe that this department has been self-sustaining, the profits on the work being equal to the salary of the master'. The role of the workshop seems then to have been twofold: to present a training opportunity for the boys as well as providing an income to support the institution. For it to have been a profitable enterprise, they must have fulfilled external contracts, although we have no written records to confirm this. The tailoring workshop also seems to have provided clothing for boys when they left Kibble, and profits were used to give assistance to them on leaving:

'In addition to the ordinary maintenance of the Institution, the Trustees have been enabled to give liberal outfits to the boys on leaving, and also to afford assistance in several cases for some time after, thus enabling them to make a fair start in life.' These are fundamental features of social enterprise activities. Evidence suggests that the focus of the tailor shop was not limited to practical aspects of the work. A 1915 entry in the minute books of the Industrial Committee notes that lessons had been given to tailor shop trainees in 'how to conduct a business'.

Trades Training

The shoemaker's workshop was the next one to be installed and a master was engaged on 7th September 1860, 'with a similar object in view'. According to the Trustees' Report, it was not yet turning a profit in 1861: 'Owing to the short period during which this has been in operation, and the boys being as yet only learning, the profits are not yet so satisfactory as on the tailoring department, but there is every reason to anticipate that in course of time the results will be equally successful.' Later records show that was indeed the case, with references in 1907 to a contract to supply the Poorhouse with boots. As part of their training, in 1910 the boys working in the shoemaker's shop were also shown round Mr Fred Lang's tannery and given an explanation of all the processes.



The motivations behind these operations are revealed in the 1861 Report:

'The object contemplated is the entire occupation of the day, under the eye of the Master, in a well-arranged division of education, industrial training, and recreation; and looking at the impressible age of the boys, the length of time they are subjected to training, and the moral influence which the constant surveillance of the master cannot fail to exert over them, there is every reason to hope that the Institution may with the Divine blessing, be instrumental in rescuing nearly all those young persons from a life of crime, and restoring them to society as useful citizens.'



Trades Training

It is worth noting that the tone of the language emphasises criminality and a justice-based approach, consistent with attitudes at the time, as the period 1854-1885 was known as the "Reformatory Era". A similar focus is evident in the Report with regard to aftercare, as well as very early references to assisted emigration:

'One of the greatest difficulties connected with the reclamation of the *criminal* population (emphasis added) has been the disposal of them after leaving either a Prison or Reformatory. Without a helping hand being extended to those unfortunates, they are often compelled to resort to their former haunts and associates. The Trustees therefore contemplate the application of a portion of the funds at their disposal to meet this difficulty, by assisting those leaving the Institution to emigrate, or aiding them for a time until they are able to support themselves by their own exertions.'

Carpentry training was another trade taught at Kibble. We do not have records to tell us exactly when this started but joinery shops were certainly established by 1907 and continued throughout the twentieth century, at least until the 1970s.

The period 1885-1932, known as the "Protective Era" represented a distinct shift of emphasis, and legislation in this period essentially demonstrated the goal of protecting children from adult work, legal processes and adult cruelty, and from some of the worst effects of adult poverty.¹ In other words, it indicated a move away from justice-based to welfare-based models.

¹ Mahood, Linda, *Policing gender, class and family: Britain 1850-1940*, London: UCL Press, 1995, p. 56

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Moss farm was established in 1868 when Kibble leased fifteen acres of ground, and farming and gardening work was well established at Kibble by the early twentieth century. This provided another training opportunity for the boys, many of whom carried on with farm work both here and abroad when they left Kibble. It was also a social enterprising operation, as it met some of the centre's own food needs as well as selling produce to the local community, thereby generating income that could be re-invested in Kibble. In addition to working on Kibble's own farmland, boys were also engaged in work on outside farms carrying out potato picking and raspberry picking, for example.

Practical farm work was supplemented by lessons in agricultural theory in areas such as dairying and poultry. Mr Leitch of the Agricultural College in Glasgow gave several series of lectures in these subjects between 1910 and 1912.

Mark, one of our oral history interviewees told us that he learned a great deal about farming during his time at Kibble in the late 1940s and early 1950s, working on Kibble's own farm and at neighbouring farms. The work must have been physically demanding as Mark told us that digging of fields was often done by boys using only spades. Ploughs were pulled by boys before the use of horse-drawn ploughs became common place. Mark is now retired but spent the rest of his working life in farming after leaving Kibble and still has a great passion for agriculture.

Farm Training and Social Enterprise

Other oral history interviewees from our staff remember the farm shop selling produce to the local community during the 1960s and 1970s:

'And every Friday, they used to sell the produce and you would have folk fae all over the Short Roods, Springbank Road, Greenock Road area. They were down there wi' prams, bogeys – everything. And they used to go in there and they used to get cabbage, turnip, carrots, big bag of tatties, you know? £2 or somethin', you know, a pound, two pound... pure fresh, I mean it was just pulled out the ground. It was only probably cut that morning or the morning, you know, the day before. But och it was amazin'...whit they made off it paid for whit they didnae have, you know for food within the school, you know?'

(Sam Hill, Carpentry Instructor at Kibble 1963-1995, interviewed 19/08/2005)

Sam also stated in his interview that the school had two thousand hens, a herd of dairy cattle, and a herd of beef cattle, which was kept on a farm rented by the school at Beith.

Later Twentieth century

The skills training aspects of Kibble endured, although the nature of this evolved. By the middle of the century, shoemaking and tailoring had been abandoned and during the 1960s and 1970s trades training was the main focus: bricklaying, joinery and plumbing. From 1984 an Electrical Instructor was also in place.

Around this time a shift in wider policy meant that the emphasis changed away from skills training towards more academic education, in an attempt to align Approved Schools with mainstream schools. This was partly due to perceptions that boys in Approved Schools may have been disadvantaged by not being offered the same educational opportunities as in the mainstream schools:

'Because things were heavily...work orientated, and then it started getting gradually less like that and they started taking on more academic teachers - Modern Studies, History, and the Art was a wee bit of an add-on.'

(Boyd McNicol, Art Teacher at Kibble, 1979-1999, interviewed 23/05/2005)

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Some former staff have expressed the belief that measures to expand academic education at Kibble in the 1980s and 1990s were at the expense of some very valuable skills training. However, lessons have been learned from the past and Kibble, whilst offering a full mainstream educational curriculum, has in recent years expanded provision for vocational training and work experience, particularly with respect to its range of small social enterprises at KibbleWorks:

'When I first started here and it was the trade training, and I used to go on about the benefits that the young folk got from that hands-on work experience. And that was thrown out as old-fashioned and "it's all about Standard Grades now". And the school had a huge sea-shift towards written qualifications. And now we've taken a step back, and everything that's happening in KibbleWorks, again, as I said before it's not new; we've done it all before, it's just that we chose to walk away from that and leave it. And we did ourselves a great disservice there and I'm glad to see there's some kind of resurgence in this hands-on work experience...And I think that's...is it Tom Farmer and Tom Hunter are both putting grants down for young folk to go and do their Skills for Work. It's a huge big 'buzz' now; we did it years ago – ahead of the times once again.'

(David Speirs, Electrical Instructor at Kibble from 1984 and Principal Teacher of Science and Technology until 2008, interviewed 08/02/2007)



David also highlights the innovative nature of Kibble: 'ahead of the times once again'. The organisation continues to innovate, developing an integrated array of specialised services to meet the ever-changing and diverse needs of the young people who come here.

With regard to skills and vocational training, the KibbleWorks enterprise and employment hub offers a spectrum of training and employment opportunities for young people who have been in care or are preparing to leave care. KibbleWorks enterprises comprise a range of business settings: motor mechanics, catering, internet radio production, picture framing, gardening, metalwork, joinery, original music composition, design and production of promotional items, warehouse skills, and office administration. These provide school leavers with opportunities to gain vocational qualifications and experience of real work environments, as well as developing time management, team working and communication skills.

Using a traditional pre-apprenticeship model to support a young person who has a range of social, emotional, behavioural and educational difficulties, KibbleWorks staff must demonstrate leadership skills whilst acting as role models and providing structured boundaries.



All the enterprise co-ordinators from KibbleWorks.

Conclusion

The last words in summarising aspects of Kibble's history should, of course come directly from some of its former pupils:

'I just liked coming. I just liked it. I don't know, it appealed to me, and I liked the staff and I got on well with the boys. And it was better than mainstream school. I think you got treated with more respect.'

(Alan Mitchell, Kibble pupil 1986-1987, Care Worker and Music Instructor at Kibble since 2005, interviewed 15/12/2006)

'I can honestly say that I enjoyed my stay there, being kept quite busy, learning lots of different things and having a very good relationship with all the Masters.... Mr Leggatt was the joiner shop master who taught me a considerable amount. He was a very exacting woodworker who did everything properly and with patience. Something which I am doing now, having just renovated a complete house after gutting it completely...I watched Mr Leggatt over quite a lengthy time, work on a teak garden gate and of course it turned out to be gorgeous. That taught me quite a lot. A very likeable man who was a guiding light in my future... I would tell the current pupils to take advantage of everything they are taught, work hard, be patient and diligent in what they are confronted with... I can say for sure that just about everything I learned at the Kibble helped me in many ways out in the big wide world. I know for sure that my life would have taken the wrong path had I not been to the Kibble, because there was no work, therefore no money coming in and it was impossible to get into a trade. I felt that my life began there and I had many good times and had them with the wonderful masters and I suppose with the tough lads.'

(Bob Burniston, Kibble pupil 1956-1958. Now living in Canada, retired Toronto Police Fitness Co-ordinator and champion athlete, interviewed 26/04/2007 via email and telephone)

Conclusion



Example of a shoemaker's workshop
Image used with permission by Peter
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If you are interested in finding out more about the skills, training and social enterprise history of Kibble, or perhaps you would like to contribute to it by telling your own story, please contact:

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