

1852 – 1854 A larger orphanage & the election of children to be admitted.

1852 So many orphans that a larger orphanage is needed.

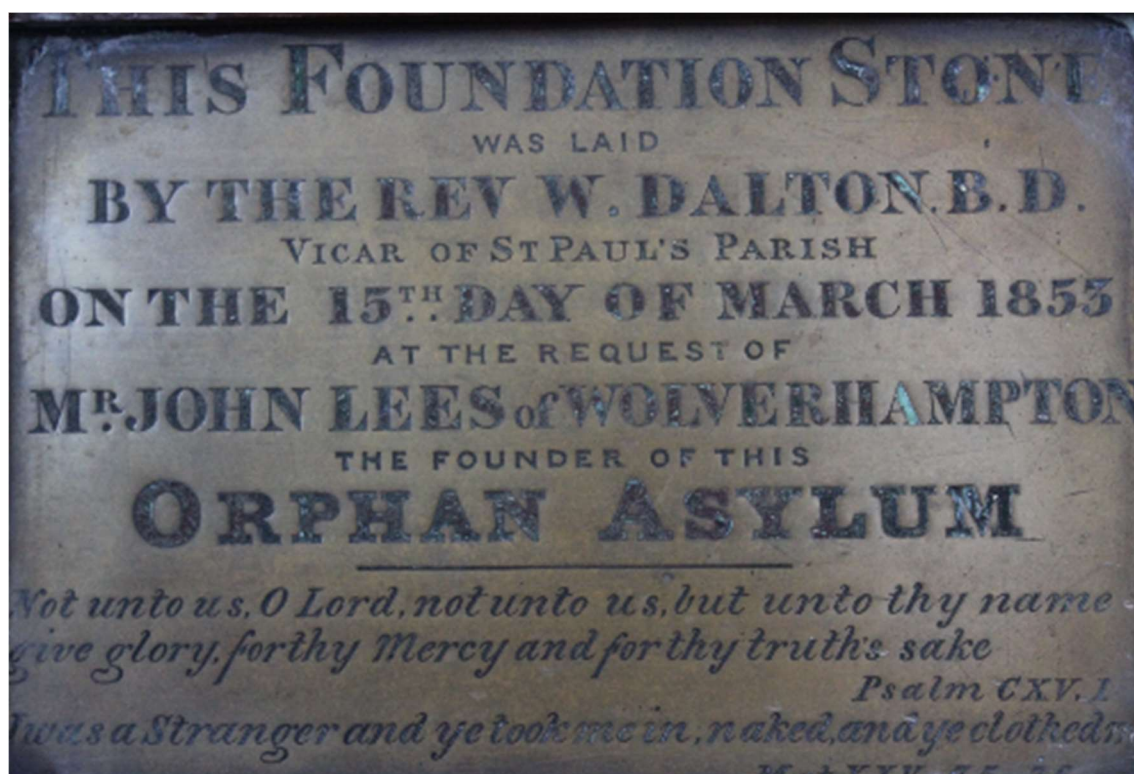
John Lees realised larger asylum was essential to look after more of the many local orphans orphaned in the Black Country foundries and metal-working factories. He looked around for a suitable piece of land for a larger orphanage.

On 29th March 1852 he purchased from Thomas Perry 2½ acres of land between Penn Road and Goldthorn Road for £1000, equivalent to £155k (all figures are shown at current equivalent values). He spent £310k on the new buildings which would include a school and also made an appeal for extra funding which initially raised just over £1m.



John Lees acquired a further 2½ acres of adjoining land which he gave to the orphanage in 1858.

1853 Foundation stone for new orphanage laid on 15th March 1853



The foundation stone was laid by the Rev. Dalton on 15th March 1853. Behind the stone were several coins in a glass bottle.

Friends and subscribers met at St. Paul's School in Merridale Street and walked up the hill to the new site to view the ceremony, led by the children (14 boys and 3 girls) and John Lees.

Behind the stone were several coins in a glass bottle.

A bible reading on the brass plate, from Matthew, Chapter 25, verses 35 & 36, states:

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'I was a stranger and ye took me'

words echoed in the inscription above the main entrance to the school



The main section of the new Orphanage was completed.

It cost of £6,000, equivalent to £850k at current rates. An appeal for donations to build it began in 1852.

Rev W. Dalton officially opened the school and presided in absence the founder, John Lees, due to ill health.

Soon it became clear that funds must be raised by public subscription. The orphanage published election lists giving details of each child proposed for admission. Donors could choose to elect a child by donating an amount and receiving a vote – the more donated, the more votes. The child or children with the most votes would gain admission. But there were strict criteria.



Donors elected individual children to be "Foundationers" from published lists.

Initially all expenses were paid by John Lees, but later money had to be raised by public subscription.

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Like many orphanages, the Wolverhampton Orphanage depended solely on the generosity of its donors. First attempts at appeals to the public failed to generate sufficient interest as people felt they would be supporting “the underserving poor”. They copied many large English orphanages and decided only to admit orphans from professional and middle-class families – no artisan’s (manual workers) children and none who were infirm or ill. They tailored their appeals to those classes who were wealthy enough to contribute on the basis that “there but for the Grace of God, go I”.

There was no State-funded social services provision to fall back on. If a professional man lost his job, and couldn’t get another, he and his family could only turn to other family members or their friends. The alternative was begging, starvation or the Workhouse – a terrible future, particularly for a professional or middle-class person who would (they thought) be much more badly affected by such an existence than would a member of the artisan class. Admission to an orphanage was a much better option.

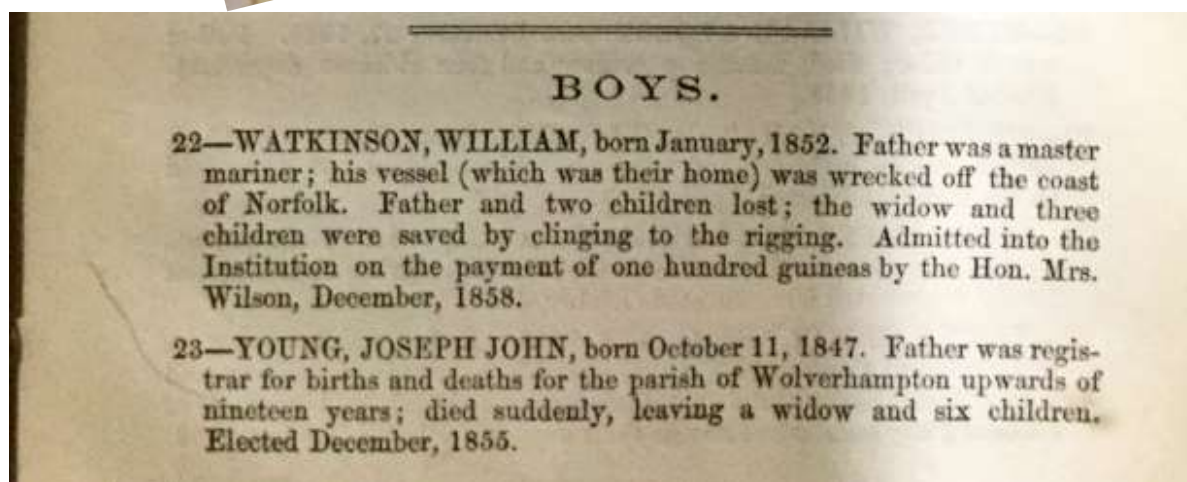
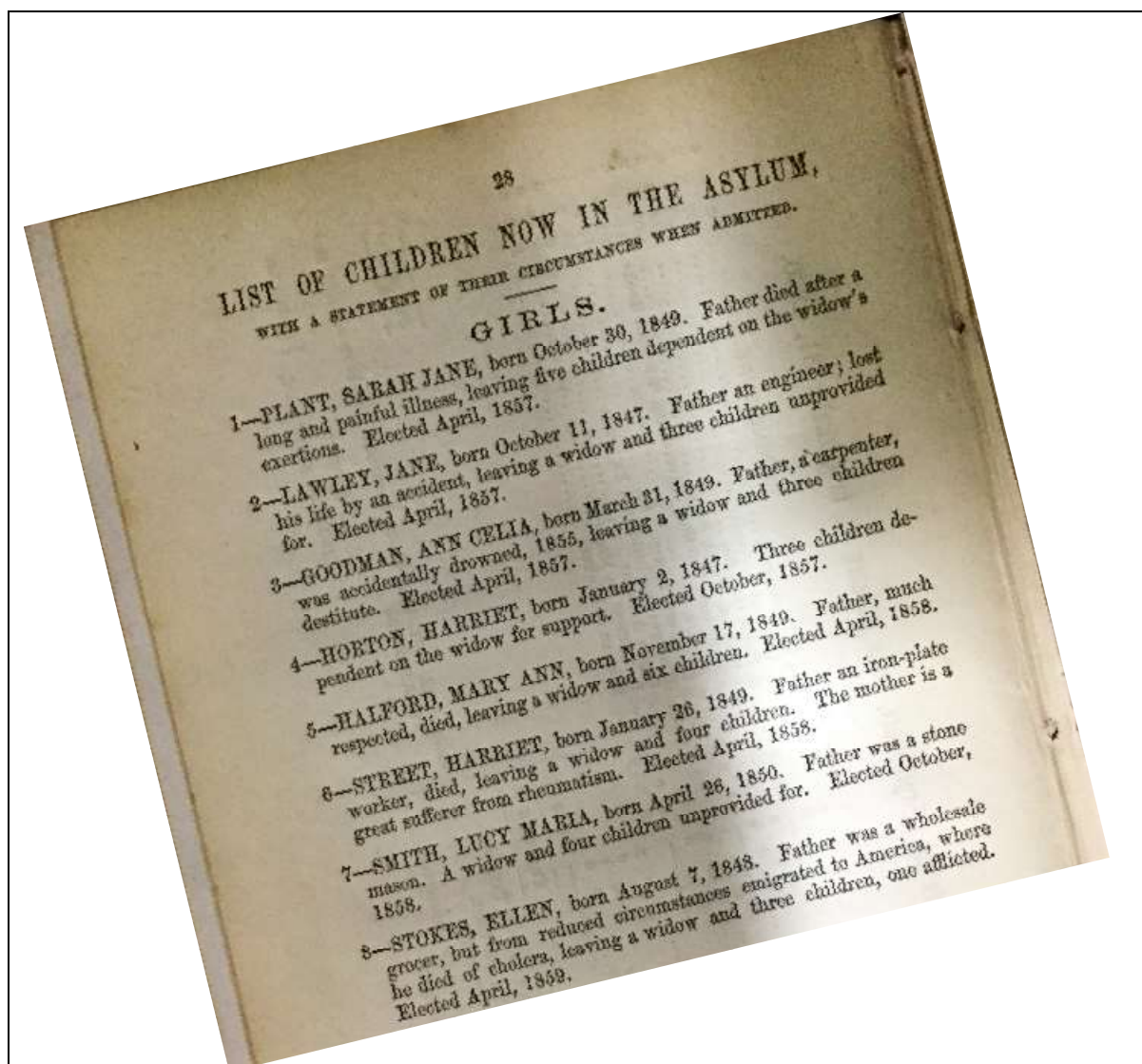
Anyone subscribing one guinea a year could become a member of the institution and have one vote at the election of children, and an extra vote for each additional guinea subscribed.



These election lists, often published twice a year, described each child and their circumstances, appealing to donors for support. They appealed to the compassion of donors by telling of the background and circumstances of each child. These caring and comparatively wealthy people could themselves relate to the calamity that had befallen each child. Here was an opportunity to help a child, perhaps from a family in a similar line of business, just as they hoped others would do if they themselves faced such a misfortune. It created a bond between caring donor and child, though they rarely met.

Groups would often meet to discuss how and why they were supporting Child A rather than Child B. Wives of wealthy men across the country held whist drives and the equivalent of our “coffee mornings” to raise further funds. A collective wish to help more, plus no doubt a competitive element, would often result in more money being collected or donated, and higher bids and much satisfaction or relief when “their child” got in.

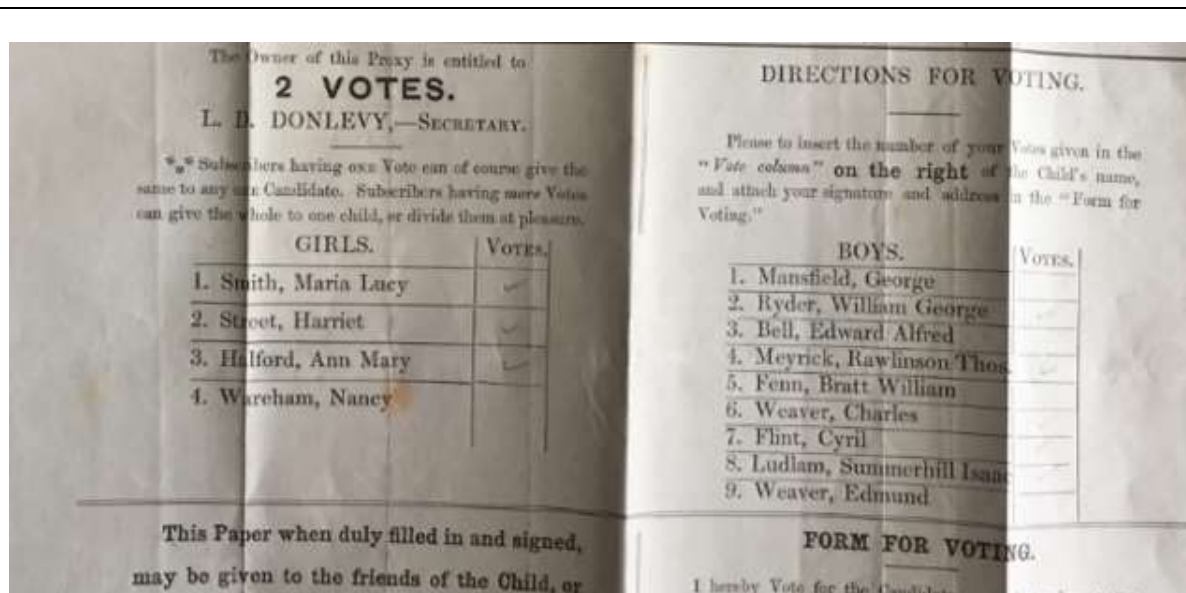
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Each child was elected, with those children with the highest value of donations being accepted - but only one from any family at a time.

The number of votes was tied to donation value. A subscriber donating over say £100 (equivalent to £16,000 now) could have the right to select a single child to join the Orphanage.

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An indication of the Rates of Subscription and the cost of purchasing admissions can be gained in the gained from this schedule.

RATES OF SUBSCRIPTION.			
ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS—			
For Two Votes	£0 10 6	For Four Votes	£1 1 0
LIFE DONATION—			
For Two Votes	£5 5 0	For Four Votes	£10 10 0
<p>The votes increasing in the proportion of two additional votes for each donation of five guineas or annual subscription of half-a-guinea.</p> <p>Persons paying special donations have the privilege of taking at one election all the votes to which such donations entitle them, but are not considered members of the Charity, nor have they the power to vote at any of its meetings.</p>			
PURCHASED ADMISSIONS—			
<p>Any duly qualified child, approved by the Board of Governors, may be admitted, without election, on payment to the Charity, if the child at the time of admission be</p> <p>Between 7 and 9 years of age, of not less than 150 Guineas.</p> <p>„ 9 and 12 „ „ 100 Guineas.</p>			

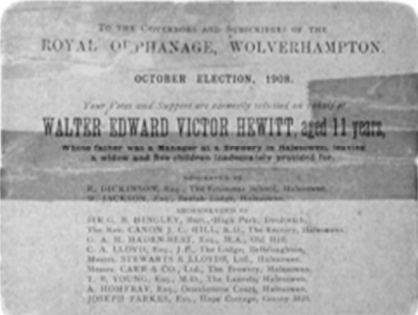
In broad terms a guinea (£1.05 in current parlance was equivalent to around £160 at 2022 prices.

The Asylum aimed to educate and train children so they could earn a living and be a credit to the Orphanage when they left at the normal age of 14. Typically, the boys would go into clerical and administration roles, working for local companies. Girls were expected to go into service or perhaps retailing.


Many children did well in life. An example is W.E.V. Hewitt, seen here in his uniform (like Christ's Hospital School) and seen too in his RFC uniform. His election details are also shown.

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The progress of W.E.V. Hewitt in the Royal Orphanage, Wolverhampton



Election for Victor Hewitt 1911 to R. O.W



Victor Hewitt 1911



**Edward Hewitt
1917
Royal Flying Corps**

There were strict criteria governing which children could be elected and admitted.

Only middle-class children were chosen to enter the asylum because John Lees believed, as did many who were wealthy, that they were hardest hit by the epidemic. Diseased or crippled children were not considered, and no more than two could come from the same family. All children had to be between 7 and 11 years of age and certificates had to be provided to show their state of health. Death certificates were also needed to prove that their parents had died.

This view was common at the time in most large orphanages. It was a tough but practical approach as it meant that many wealthy middle-class families contributed, often thinking “there but for the grace of God, go I”. Previous appeals for donations without these constraints had failed to interest enough subscribers.

There was no social services support except the harsh Workhouse. You were thrown out on the streets. Hopefully, orphans, and even their mothers, could be taken in by their wider family members and friends.

Major fundraising for the Wolverhampton Orphan Asylum took place with a major element being whist drives organised across the country by women.

Many companies and organisations made considerable donations, all being carefully acknowledged by name and amount in the annual financial report.

Donations were sought from across the whole country. The orphans also came from a wider background. Sometimes, they were from different industries – including heavily publicised disasters such as a ship sinking – though the parent(s) were usually local to the Black Country.

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