

## PEOPLE WE MEET ON THE STREETS: PART 2

Philip M. Banham

The first part of this article (in *TML* 22) considered photographic magic lantern slides by John Thomson and Walter Grimshaw in their historical context. Thomson's photographs were primarily taken to illustrate his book *Street Life in London* and the small number converted into slides were seen by relatively few people, as perhaps were those slides taken by Walter Grimshaw for Archer & Sons. This was changed by a new generation of documentary photographers. Their aim was to produce high quality lantern slides to be projected to as many people as possible for educational or propaganda purposes. This article takes a brief look at one of the main figures among these pioneers.

### THOMAS BARNARDO AND HIS PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIO

While he was a medical student at a London hospital, Thomas John Barnardo (1845-1905) became concerned at the number of destitute young children roaming the streets and resolved to do something to help the situation. Initially, in 1868, he set up a Ragged School for these 'Street Arabs' at Hope Place, Limehouse, in the East End of London. On opening the school room one morning he discovered a pupil who had spent the night there, having nowhere else to sleep.

With the powerful support of the Earl of Shaftesbury (1801-85) and his friends, Barnardo was encouraged to set up a residential home for these homeless boys at Stepney Causeway in 1870, the first of a national network of 'Dr Barnardo's Homes'. There is no record of Barnardo using a camera himself but he was one of the first to realise that photography could be "used in a wholly functional way for public relations and as a source of income for charitable work."<sup>1</sup> In addition, he realised that photographs taken of all the residents in his home would provide a useful document, to which the name of the child and date of entry could be added together with a reference number. From 1874 and for the next 30 years "every child who entered one of Barnardo's homes had their photograph taken. Children were photographed when they first arrived and again several months later after they had recovered from their experiences of living on the streets."<sup>2</sup>

It soon became apparent that the problem of abandoned and orphaned children in London was a much wider issue than had been first thought. There was a clear need for Dr Barnardo to expand his mission. This would require funds and strong public understanding and support.

In 1874 Barnardo had taken a risky decision to employ Thomas Barnes (1809-1901) as an in-house professional photographer and set up a studio with an assistant. At the time the Trustees of Barnardo's charity might well have considered that to spend their limited funds in this way was not in accordance with the intention of the public donations that supported their work. Such a project had not previously been attempted by any other charitable organisation. Using pairs of slides to show the ragged child when first rescued and then a few months later after the child had been washed, dressed in clean clothes and had their hair cut, the visual effect told the story clearly. These 'before' and 'after' slides became a powerful



1. A typical 'before' Barnardo lantern slide image – two 'waifs from the streets'

tool both to inform the public of the social problem and to raise funds. Barnardo, who was an excellent public speaker, used these slides in his presentations. Unfortunately few of them have survived. The examples illustrated (Figs 1-4) demonstrate how this material was used. In addition, some of the photographs were produced as *cartes de visite* and sold to raise funds (Figs 5 and 6).

Not everyone was enthusiastic about the success of Dr Barnardo. The Reverend George Reynolds, a local Baptist Minister, was critical of raising funds by means of these 'before' and 'after' photographs, claiming:

"the system of taking, and making capital of, the children's photographs is not only dishonest, but has a tendency to destroy the better feelings of the children. Barnardo's method is to take the children as they are supposed to enter the Home, and then after they have been in the Home for some time. He is not satisfied with taking them as they really are, but he tears their clothes, so as to make them appear worse than they really are."<sup>3</sup>

He could have added the accusation that Barnardo smeared the children's faces with dirt or soot in the 'before' photographs.



2. An 'after' slide – a street urchin cleaned and trained up to be a useful member of society (in this case, a shoeshine boy). The wording on the boy's hat reads 'Boys' Refuge'.



3. Another 'before' slide, the group carefully posed for artistic effect.



4. 'After' slide – boys (possibly some of those from Fig. 3) being put to useful work, chopping wood to make firelighters.



5. Carte de visite photograph by the Woodbury process, showing a group of 'street Arabs' supposedly being discovered; the official's hand lamp is perhaps supposed to suggest an incident taking place at night.



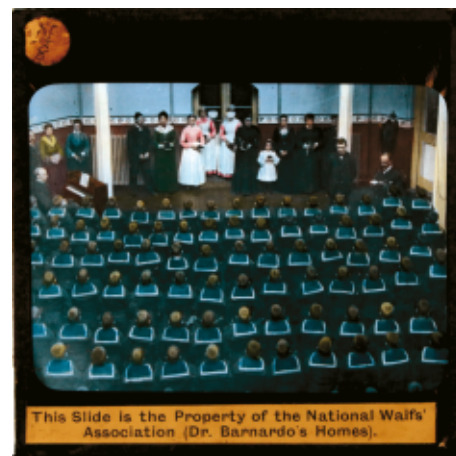
6. Carte de visite carbon-print photograph, 'The Crossing Sweeper'. The image is similar to, and possibly based on, O.G. Rejlander's famous photograph 'Night in Town'.

One can only guess at the hurt experienced by Barnardo once these comments were published. In order to clear his name he decided that these accusations should be given a public hearing in the Arbitration Court. At the hearing in 1877 Barnardo claimed that he acted as any normal parent would, by first delousing and washing the entrant. Only once settled in the Home would the photograph be taken as the child first appeared on entry, which in any case was frequently in the middle of a dark night when photography would have been impossible.

Barnardo no doubt thought he had presented a fair and truthful account of the situation and his actions would have been considered by the Court to have been entirely reasonable. However, the judgement was a disappointment, as the finding was that the 'before' and 'after' photographs were judged to be "artistic fiction". This raised an important general



7. A later slide (the children's clothes suggest possibly 1920s?) made for publicity by Dr Barnardo's Homes.



8. Barnardo's publicity slide showing boys in uniform at a rather severe-looking religious assembly

question about the 'truth' of photographs. As a result the notion of the accuracy of the photographic 'record' was destabilised and the authenticity of any photograph purporting to be a correct portrayal of social history came into question.

After the Court judgement Barnardo's photographic studio ceased taking the 'before' and 'after' images, but continued to use photographic magic lantern slides (Figs 7 and 8) showing their children in the Home, in their training workshops and in follow-up images after gaining employment. Thomas Barnardo used some of these later slides at the Annual General Meetings of the Barnardo's Homes held at the Royal Albert Hall in the 1890s.<sup>4</sup>

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

All images are from the author's collection, photographs by Rosemary Banham (Figs 5 and 6) and Richard Crangle (all others).

1. Michel Frizot (ed.), *A new history of photography*, Könemann, 1998, p.350
2. Valerie Lloyd, 'The camera and Dr Barnardo' in *The camera and Dr Barnardo*, National Portrait Gallery, London, 1974, p.16
3. Michael Wong, 'The doctor, the photograph and the court case of 1877'; blog post of 22 April 2010, <https://britishphotohistory.ning.com/profiles/blogs/the-doctor-the-photographs-amp> (retrieved 16 May 2020)
4. Lloyd, p.16