

February, 2017



British Home Child Group International

The Knowlton Home by Sandra Joyce

Design and Layout by Karen Mahoney

"At Knowlton we received a most cheering and hearty reception, and everyone who visited the Home seemed delighted with the children... Occasionally during the first days of our distribution work there would be a hue and cry from the children, 'A farmer's coming!' 'Oh, let him have me, Mrs. Birt!' 'No, let him have me. I want to be a farmer and earn my own living'." Lillian Birt, *The Children's Home-Finder* 1913.

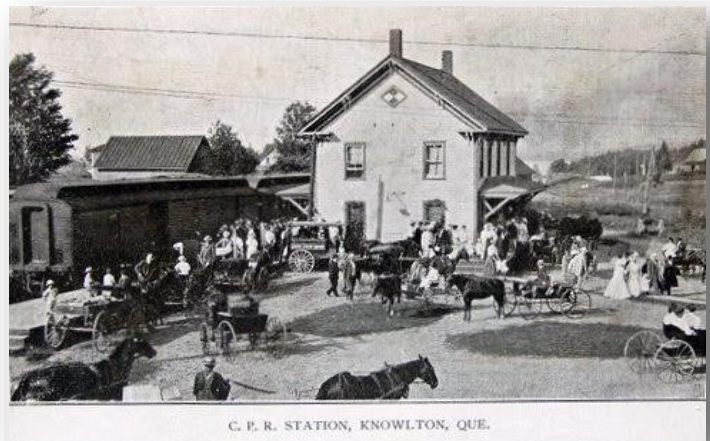
Opened in 1872, The Knowlton Home in Knowlton, Quebec was the third Receiving Home that Scottish evangelist Annie MacPherson opened in Canada. Marchmont Home in Belleville was the first. Galt, Ontario was second.

Emily Barber, who had assisted Annie MacPherson at her Home for Industry for Destitute Children in Spitalfields, East London, became supervisor of Knowlton. After the opening of Knowlton, MacPherson would divide the children brought over amongst the three Homes in Ontario.

Meanwhile, a request to speak about her work with prominent philanthropists in Liverpool led MacPherson to send her sister, Louisa Birt, in her stead. After this meeting, Mrs. Birt was invited to head what became the Liverpool Sheltering Homes.

In 1875, MacPherson turned the running of Marchmont over to friend Ellen Bilbrough and in 1877, MacPherson chose the Galt Home to be her main focus, relinquishing the running of Knowlton to her sister Mrs. Louisa Birt.

Daughter of a Quebec banker, Elizabeth Meiklejohn, was appointed Knowlton's superintendent, a position she held for 26 years. Mrs. Birt began to send children from Liverpool's workhouses and institutions and The Liverpool Sheltering Homes' primary function soon became that of a temporary shelter with the ultimate goal being the emigration of children to Canada.



C. P. R. STATION, KNOWLTON, QUE.

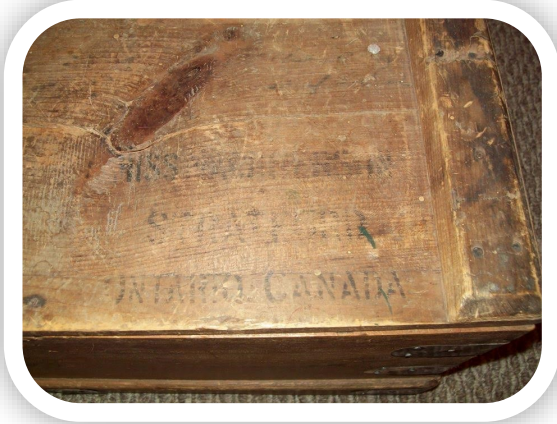


After illness prevented Mrs. Birt from carrying on her work in 1910, her daughter, Lillian Birt, took over. Her work there was short-lived. A fire damaged the property in 1913 and then the First World War began, stopping the flow of children.

After Mrs. Birt's death in 1915, The Knowlton Home was closed and operations were combined with the fourth MacPherson Home in Stratford, Ontario.

A Two by One Foot Box by Rick Olley

This is the box that held all my grandfather's belongings when he was shipped from England to Canada aboard the SS Tunisian in 1908, at the age of 8. He was a British Home Child and had been living in an institution in London for vagrant children from 1906 until 1908. The lettering on the box says A. (Arthur) Olley, GTR (Grand Trunk Railway), No. 21, Miss MacPherson Stratford Ontario Canada (the Receiving Home where he stayed for two months before a farmer picked him out of a line-up of boys to work on a farm). He never talked about this. The only two things I ever heard from my grandfather was "England wasn't a very nice place back then" and "the wind blew my cap off into the sea" (a big loss I imagine when all you own is packed into a 2 by 1 foot box).



Help Us Achieve Our Canada 150 Memorial Plaque Project.

The British Home Child Group International in collaboration with the Hastings County Historical Society in Belleville, Ontario is raising \$2,000 for a historical plaque to be placed on Marchmont House in Belleville.

We would greatly appreciate contributions from our members to reach this goal that we have pledged! The plaque is scheduled to be unveiled on September 28th, 2017, British Home Child Day in Ontario.

The Marchmont Home, was one of the first and most important Receiving Homes for British Home Children in Canada. Many organizations, including Barnardo's and Quarrier's were sent through Annie MacPherson's Receiving Home in Belleville.

It is believed that over 10,000 British Home Children passed through the Marchmont Homes to their placements yet there is no plaque on this building designating its significance.

To contribute to this project, please click on [GoFundMe](#)

This year, when we are celebrating Canada's 150th birthday, it is imperative to remember the contributions that the British Home Children made to our great country and to remember their humble and vulnerable beginnings.

Mrs. Louisa MacPherson Birt by Sandra Joyce

"Picture the grey, rolling North Atlantic; the crowded steerage and decks of the steamer laden with emigrants. Under a lifeboat, screened from the wind and spray by a stretch of canvas, sit the group of children in their warm coats and caps or hoods. Singing, stories, recitations, friendly talks, interspersed with drills or skipping and races, occupy the time. This voyage of eight or ten days is of incalculable benefit to the city-bred children, bracing and strengthening them after a winter's training, and giving them a healthful relaxation of play and rest before they start out on their new careers." *The Children's Home-Finder* by Lillian Birt, (London:1913)

Louisa Caroline MacPherson, the youngest daughter of Scottish teacher James MacPherson, was often taken, along with her siblings, to his speaking engagements. During these lectures, Louisa listened to their father speak about the moral responsibility God-fearing people had to those less fortunate. At home, Louisa experienced this belief first hand as the MacPherson family fostered two orphaned girls.

Soon, Mr. MacPherson, who was a member of the Society of Friends (Quakers), was asked to move his wife and seven children to England to establish schools on the estate of Lady Lovelace. Ada Lovelace, the daughter of Lord Byron, died of uterine cancer at the age of 36 and in the last months of her life, underwent a religious transformation under her mother's influence and made her the executor of her will.

At the estate schools, the pupils learned to read and write, as well as nature, household duties and industrial training.

In 1858, Louisa married Charles Henry Birt, a merchant in the City of London, at the age of 17. However, happiness in her married life eluded her. Two of her eldest children passed away and her husband was left an invalid by a railroad accident.

Louisa and Charles hoped that travelling to a more favourable climate would improve Charles' health but after Louisa's bouts of rheumatic fever and malaria, it was imperative for them to return home.

To rejuvenate her, sisters Annie and Rachel, who had begun working with the poor in London's Bethnal Green, invited their sister to join them. Her duties were light at first, singing to widows and children but soon evolved into working with the young, even chaperoning them to Canada to find living situations for them. *Continued on page 4.....*

1858. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of St. James in the County of Surrey							
No.	When Married.	Name and Residence.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Residence.
482	April 7 th	Henry Birt London	24	Single	Merchant	St. James London	John Birt St. James London
		Louisa Caroline MacPherson Glasgow	17	Single	Teacher	St. James London	James MacPherson Glasgow

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by Licence or after by us.

This Marriage was solemnized between us: Henry Birt in the Presence of us: Joseph Henry
James MacPherson James MacPherson

Unveiling of BHCGL's Quilt and Extensive Two Week Exhibit

To celebrate Canada's 150th Birthday, we are pleased to announce an extensive two week exhibit of British Home Child artifacts at the newly renovated Newmarket Old Town Hall. The exhibit will be opened on April 1st at noon with a presentation and the unveiling of the Canada's 150th British Home Child 2017 Memorial Quilt. We are honoured to be invited to have our exhibit in Newmarket's most treasured and historical cultural landmark. The exhibit will be open everyday from noon to 8pm.



Mrs. Louisa MacPherson Birt *continued*



Scottish diaspora tapestry GB-E14

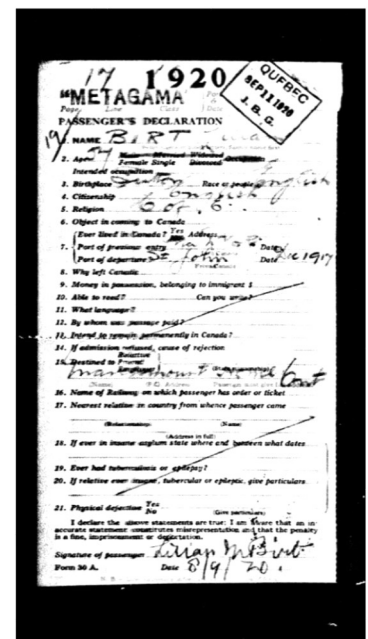
Meanwhile, in the late 1860s, inspired by the work of Louisa's sister Annie with the poor in London, a group of major ship-builders desired to improve the lot of the destitute in Liverpool. Alexander Balfour, Stephen Williamson and John Houghton were appalled by the living conditions of the poor in their city and considered it to be worse than London. They invited Annie to speak but she sent her sister Louisa in her stead, citing too many prior commitments.

As a result of this meeting, The Liverpool Sheltering Homes were opened on May 1, 1873 and were housed in Byrom Hall Baptist Church. The purpose of the Homes was to rescue destitute and neglected children, train them in the care of the home and then send them to a new life in Canada accompanied by guardians. They were to stay at the Marchmont House in Belleville, Ontario, before being placed and indentured until they were 18. Louisa Birt was to spearhead the organization.

Louisa Birt had found her calling - helping impoverished children. She made sure outfits were sewn, cleaned and cared for the children and accompanied every group of children to Canada. While there, she also spent time visiting previously placed children.

In 1877, after Louisa's sister Annie no longer required the use of the Knowlton Receiving Home, the Liverpool Sheltering Home sent the children there. When Louisa's health failed her in 1911, her daughter Lilian Birt took over the running of the Homes.

Mrs. Birt died on the May, 7, 1915, aged 74. During Louisa Birt's lifetime thousands of children were emigrated to Canada by the Liverpool Sheltering Homes and many settled in the Eastern Townships of Quebec.



Lilian Birt Arrival to Canada 1920

BIRT Louisa of the Sheltering Homes and of 1 Sugnall-street both in **Liverpool** widow died 7 May 1915 at 1 Sugnall-street Probate **Liverpool** 12 February to Lilian Mary Birt spinster. Effects £254 17s. 5d.



The Amsterdam Brewery and the British Home Child Group International are proud to present a screening of Eleanor McGrath's 'Forgotten' on Tuesday May 16 in their event room. Doors open at 6:30 pm and screening begins at 7 pm. Panel discussion to follow film. Limited \$10 tickets may be purchased by etransfer or cheque. If available, cash only at the door. Parking is free!

Coffee, tea and beer sampling included. Wine or beer may be purchased.

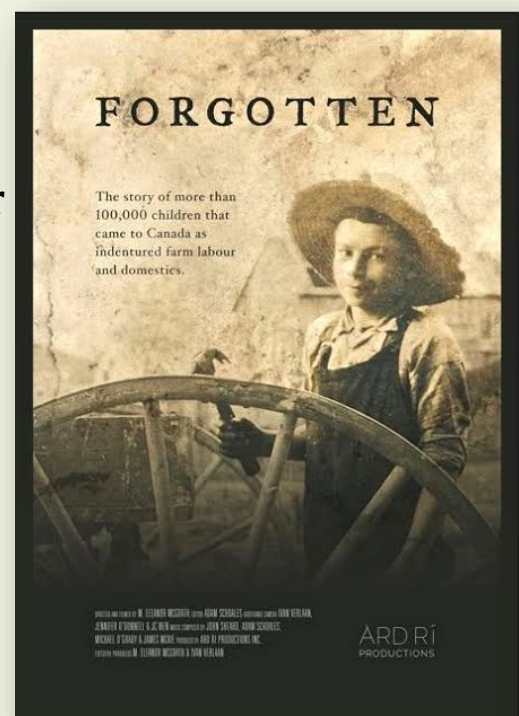
Cheques should be submitted to:

British Home Child Group International

97 Dagmar Avenue

Toronto, Ontario M4M 1V9

Extensive British Home Child artifacts on display.





Our new [apology petition](#) is up and running! Please note we can sign this petition even if we have signed a previous one! Anyone who is a Canadian Citizen or Resident can sign!



Have you seen our YouTube presentation on [British Home Children?](#)



*British Home Child Group
International*

By email: connect@britishhomechild.com

By regular mail: 97 Dagmar Ave., Toronto, ON, M4M 1V9

Our website: www.britishhomechild.com

To book a speaker: sandrajoyce@rogers.com

Follow Us!

