

## How many children were cared for by Spurgeons at Birchington?

This question has been posed by Jenny Burgess, local historian at Birchington, for a magazine article.

Spurgeons first looked after children at Birchington from 1923 when children were transferred to Birchington Hall from Spurgeon's Seaside Home in Cliftonville, Margate. Only the youngest children were cared for at Cliftonville and at Birchington Hall, although a Sick Bay (infirmary) was built in the Birchington grounds (in the 1930s?) which provided a place of convalescence for children of all ages. No children were in residence in Birchington during WW2 from early 1940 to 1946.

All children were transferred (from Reigate) to purpose-built accommodation in the early 1950s: boys of junior school age transferred in September 1951 and all the girls and the older boys in April 1953.

Spurgeons began to close the large residential home during 1977. There were 20 children in residence at 31 March 1978.

The minimum age for entry into Spurgeons has varied over the period (early on, 6 and 7 years for boys and girls respectively, to 4 years in the later 1930s and then 0 years when babies were admitted in 1954. A maximum age for entry (11 years) was stipulated for a considerable part of the early period, although children stayed until they completed their education.

### Estimating the Number of Children at Birchington

The numbers of children coming into and leaving Spurgeons' care is available readily as a global number for boys and for girls. On this basis it is relatively easy to work out the number of children passing through Birchington for the period 1953 to 1978 by looking at the annual total dismissal numbers. There is, however, no easy way to identify how many children began life in Spurgeons at Birchington Hall and so for the period 1923 to 1940 and 1946 to 1953, I have had to make an educated guess. I have assumed that one-eighth of the children joining Spurgeons in the period 1923-1953 spent some time at Birchington Hall. Since this factor is only a guess I decided not to make any adjustment for the war years.

For the 60 or so boys who came to Birchington 18 months earlier than everyone else I have assumed the one-tenth of them may have left in that period and so are not included in the analysis of the later period.

### Summary Statistics

Period	Boys	Girls	Total
1923-1953 (est)	166	113	279*
1951-1953 (est)	6	0	6
1953-1978	951	596	1547
Temporary to 1968	77	61	138 ) Children not included
Temporary 1968-78 (est)	60	50	110** ) in main statistics
In residence 1978	14	6	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>1274</b>	<b>826</b>	<b>2100</b>

\* Could be an under-estimate

\*\* Could be an over-estimate – I have no idea for how long after 1968 children staying for short periods where not included in the main statistics. In the analysis I have assumed that 6 and 5 boys and girls per year respectively continued to be treated in the records as "temporary". Prior to 1968 the numbers are given explicitly in the annual summaries. There are no annual summaries after 1968.

The simple answer to Jenny's question is that about 2,100 children were cared for by Spurgeons at Birchington over the period 1923 to 1978. Some estimates were needed to arrive at this figure: it cannot be treated as an exact number.

*Keith Hide*