

Adoption History—Croydon:**The MISSION OF HOPE and THE HOMELESS CHILDREN'S AID AND ADOPTION SOCIETY :****Introduction:**

These notes are intended to provide some background information for anyone involved in adoptions made through The Mission of Hope and The Homeless Children's Aid and Adoption Society (HCAAS). They are based on the collective experiences of adoption workers in Croydon who have many years of experience in accessing archived adoption files from those two former Adoption Agencies, latterly known as Christian Family Concern. Their records were passed to Croydon Council when Christian Family Concern closed in 1992.

These notes are not exhaustive, as everyone who had contact with the agencies concerned will have their own experiences and memories. However, it is hoped that what follows will provide some additional background information which may expand on and illuminate the information available in individual archived adoption records.

Suggested Additional Reading:

The History of Christian Family Concern---see Christian Family Concern Website

Adoption History---Croydon

Glossary of Historical Adoption Terms---Croydon Adoption

Croydon Adoption—"Frequently Asked Question"---

adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk ----Government sponsored website

"Family Secrets—Living with Shame from the Victorians to the Present Day"—Deborah Cohen—published by Viking 2013—ISBN : 978-0-670-91766-2

General Comments :

Croydon Council is the custodian of archived records from The Mission of Hope dating back to 1900 and from The HCAAS from 1920 onwards to 1993. The archived adoption records are individual manual files, usually quite brief, which are now stored off site, and are accessed electronically by Croydon Adoption. Copies of records are sent to Adoption Support Workers, who will share with the applicant, where appropriate. The originals of letters in birth parents' handwriting, other documents

which carry a birth parent's signature, photographs, and other memorabilia, can be requested separately.

Archived Adoption records are often flimsy because of their age and often difficult to decipher. Handwriting is often unclear and terms used are often arcane. A brief Glossary of Historical Terms which explains some of the terms used has been prepared to assist adoption support workers and service users and will be attached to these notes. Again, these are not comprehensive and some constructive imagination may have to be applied by the reader of the archived files.

Readers need to keep in mind that the standards of recording in the early to late 1900s were not as high as they are today and there may be gaps in basic information. The language used in archived adoption files reflected the style of the times. You also need to keep in mind that society's values and attitudes were not as they are today. It is also a fact that adoption legislation and practice have changed considerably since the first Adoption Act in England and Wales in 1926 and then in Scotland in 1930.

Please note that no day-to-day records of the care of birth mothers and their children at The Mission of Hope (Birdhurst Lodge and other homes) and the HCAAS (Hutchison House) have survived. It is not clear what records were kept other than those now held as archived adoption files.

Adoptions Pre November 12 1975 in England and Wales

The people who were involved in adoptions in England and Wales prior to November 12 1975 , including birth parents and adoptive parents, would not have expected an adopted person to be gaining access to information from adoption files. This is partly because of the change in Adoption Law in England and Wales in 1975. Before that date, birth families and adopters were told that the adopted person would not easily be able to access their birth records. Adoption was very much a "clean break".

Adopted people had great difficulty in accessing their birth and adoption records, unless they knew their birth name, where their birth was registered and the name of the Adoption Agency which placed them. However, the Children Act 1975, and the subsequent Adoption Act 1976, made it easier for adopted people to access their birth and adoption records. The Law was made retrospective, which is why people adopted prior to November 12 1975 have to be interviewed and offered counselling before being given information which could lead to applying for their birth records.

Adoption Law in Scotland has a different history.

Social Factors:

Generally, from 1900 to the late 1960s and mid-1970s, the "supply" of babies for adoption exceeded demand. Potential adopters could generally specify the age and

gender of a baby as their choice for adoption. However, the peak of all adoptions in England and Wales was in 1968 when approximately 25,000 adoption orders were made, half of which were in-family adoptions. Social conditions began to change after the late 1960s, with the Abortion Act of 1967, the introduction of the contraceptive pill, and the development of movements such as Shelter, for better Housing, and greater Welfare Benefits for unmarried mothers began to have effect. (See the film “Cathy Come Home”—Shelter----Also see Mike Lee’s film “Secrets and Lies” for a more modern take on the dilemmas of adoption)

The Mission of Hope:

The Mission of Hope was a long established Adoption Agency which had been in operation since Victorian days. It was a Christian based agency, well known nationally at the time. It was based at Birdhurst Lodge, South Park Hill Road, in South Croydon and at other buildings, at different times, in South London. It placed children with adopters from around the country and sometimes overseas. It merged in 1982 with another adoption agency, The Homeless Children’s Aid and Adoption Society, with which it had been closely related, and for a while was called The Mission of Hope for Children’s Aid and Adoption. It later became Christian Family Concern. Their archived adoption files were eventually passed to Croydon Council for safekeeping in 1993 when Christian Family Concern ceased to be an Adoption Agency. You can find a full history of The Mission of Hope at the web site for Christian Family Concern.

The Mission of Hope was a Christian organisation “*carried on for the reception of expecting Mothers (single women) of otherwise good character, and of respectable antecedents, who can be received, one, two, three months, or longer, previous to their confinement*” (Quoted from *The Mission of Hope Application Form*).

The Mission of Hope was careful to take in only birth mothers who came from “decent” backgrounds, and particularly from a Christian home, though non-practising birth mothers were also admitted.

Most birth mothers-to-be who were resident at The Mission of Hope were relatively young, generally between the ages of 18 and 30. Taking up residence there is likely to have been their first experience of residential care and of living away from home. The regime at Birdhurst Lodge, the main residential unit of The Mission of Hope, was quite strict by modern standards. For example, no male visitors were allowed except by the Matron’s invitation, no correspondence was allowed with male friends without special permission, letters would have had to be shown to Matron if she requested. Residents were expected to share in domestic work and to look after their child when born---“*Inmates are required during the months or weeks of waiting, to help cheerfully in the various branches of work in the home*”—usually domestic work or gardening. Attendance at Church Services and Bible Reading Classes was strongly

encouraged. *“Inmates are not allowed beyond the garden without the Matron’s permission”.*

Birth mothers-to-be were usually booked in for the later stages of their confinement and remained until their baby was ready for placement with adopters. This was usually a few weeks after birth, though some birth mothers chose to leave as soon as they could and before their baby was placed. The Mission of Hope did not place a baby until it reached a certain weight after birth, usually 7 and a half pounds.

Not all babies born at The Mission were placed for adoption. Some mothers took their baby home or made other arrangements for care, such as Private Fostering or with extended family . The Mission’s Application Form notes *“If able to take the baby with her, the patient can leave as soon as medically fit. If she desires our help in placing the baby, she must remain one week after the baby is fully weaned, or until Matron feels the baby can safely be left without its mother”.*

Most birth mothers gave birth in the Maternity Unit of The Mission, though if the Unit was full, or there were complications, the mother would be sent to a local hospital, usually the Mayday hospital in Croydon, for the birth.

Babies born with disabilities or any medical issue or questions about race and colour would have been discharged with its mother *“No case can be retained in the Home should the Medical Officer upon examination consider it to be unsuitable”---quote from Application Form in the 1950s.*

NB---these rules may have been relaxed at a later stage by The Mission of Hope.

By the 1980s The Mission had generally adapted to the standards of social welfare work and to adoption practice of the times.

There are no records which show what proportion of babies born at The Mission were placed for adoption and how many left with their birth mothers. The only archived records held by Croydon Adoption Team are for those babies placed for adoption. (However, see “manual Registers”—below)—approx 17,000 babies were placed for adoption by The Mission of Hope/Homeless Children’s Aid and Adoption Society /Christian Family Concern between 1900 and 1993.

Birth mothers had to pay for their keep at the Mission and the latter were diligent in pursuing unpaid bills. Birth mothers who were reluctant to pay or could not pay might be asked to remove their child before adoption or have their child returned from the adopters. This was an extreme threat, and often bluff, as The Mission was usually keen for the child to be adopted.

Birth mothers were expected to complete an Application Form for their own admission to The Mission of Hope and, later, an Application Form for their baby to be “Admitted”, that is, placed for adoption.

All birth mothers-to-be were expected to have medical tests at Special Clinics before admission and to provide medical information about themselves and their family. They were expected to give their parents' names and occupations, and their home addresses as well as any current address.

Some adoptions were arranged by The Mission of Hope without the birth mother being resident at a Mission Home. This was sometimes because the birth mother-to-be had discovered that she was pregnant late in her pregnancy and there was no time for admission to The Mission.

MISSION OF HOPE Homes in Croydon and Streatham:

In addition to Birdhurst Lodge, South Park Hill Road:

Rokeby---54 Leigham Court Road, Streatham SW16 (see below for details)

"The Moorings", 2 Champion Park, Denmark Hill

"Lake View" 48 and 50 Thicket Road, Anerley SE 20

Deepdene—for toddlers--Hurst Road, South Croydon

"Deanfield"—for little children –St. Peter's Road, South Croydon

"Essendene" ---for girls and sick children--- Hurst Road South Croydon

Sunshine Nursery—for babies—Birdhurst Lodge

Hurst House----for boys--- Hurst Road, South Croydon

"Hope House"—Receiving Home—93 Grove Lane, Camberwell SE 5

"Lilian Barker Home" –119 Croydon Road, Anerley SE 20

"Blythswood" 43 St. Peter's Road, South Croydon

(Please note that these homes changed names and opened and closed over time)

The experiences of birth mothers at The Mission varied enormously. Some enjoyed their stay, made friends of other residents and staff, and wrote warmly of their experiences. Others were not so happy because of the strict regime at Birdhurst Lodge, and felt badly treated. No records were kept of complaints, but some birth mothers have recalled bad experiences of their care at The Mission and at the hands of their parents, who sometimes took control.

It is probably true to say that all birth mothers were overcome by the experience of becoming a parent, usually out of wedlock, because of the shame and stigma that this carried at the time. Their home and work life would have been disrupted and often only their immediate family knew of their "trouble". Sometimes even the father of a mother-to-be was kept in the dark. In some cases a birth mother would keep her

pregnancy a secret from all of her family. Many mothers-to-be would have been sent away from home, perhaps to stay with a friend or relative, long before their due date and admission to The Mission. Getting back to “normal” life, was often difficult and dealing with the grief of having to give up their child would have been very difficult for most birth mothers. There was little support in the community, though sometimes birth mothers had a Moral Welfare Worker or a friend or relative to help them.

Many birth mothers, looking back, feel aggrieved that they were made to give their child up for adoption.

It is not clear what “counselling” and objective support birth mothers received at The Mission. As noted above, day to day records were either not kept or have not survived. The role of The Mission was to support birth mothers in the process of placing their child for adoption. This was, after all, the reason why most birth mothers entered The Mission.

Quote from a letter from the Director of The Mission to a birth mother’s family in November 1952: *“I know that some of the girls pour out their hearts to some of the nurses, saying how they hate the thought of parting with their baby, and I expect some of the nurses do take the line of saying, “Well, is there no other way, can’t you manage to keep the baby,” but I don’t think it would be true to say that there is a real persuading one way or the other. I personally feel very strongly that we must not persuade a mother either way, but try to be willing to help her along whichever line she decides. Obviously it is not easy for some of the girls to face up with parting with their little one, but it does seem in many ways that it is the best way through”.*

The Mission of Hope clearly strove to meet the expressed wishes of birth mothers whilst at the same time meeting the needs of Christian families who wished to adopt a child.

Some babies were sent abroad for adoption. One question on the Application Form for The Mission of Hope, completed by birth mothers, asked if the mother was willing for the child to be sent abroad. This generally meant to adopters who lived abroad, often Missionaries, but also to Holland where the Mission sent a number of children in the early days up to the 1950s. Why Holland, is not clear, though Church Ministers in Holland knew of The Mission of Hope. In Holland at the time it was not legally possible to adopt a Dutch child.

Others were removed from adoptive parents before an adoption order could be made. This was sometimes because birth mothers had changed their minds, or because the baby had developed a severe illness or disability. If the child was not legally adopted after being in The Mission, the child would have been deemed “in the care” of The Mission and either returned to the birth mother or placed with a foster parent or placed in another, long term, children’s home. No Adoption Record would have been kept, but the names of these children may be found in the manual Adoption Registers kept by The Mission and now held by Croydon Council. These

Registers also contain the names of children placed for adoption, and record visits and sometimes other information.

Children in the care of The Mission of Hope but not adopted:

In addition, **Croydon Local Studies Library** holds approx. 2,500 case records of children born at The Mission but not placed for adoption. Application for access to these records needs to be made direct to the Croydon Local Studies Library, based in the Central Library, Croydon.

Further, some children, who were not placed for adoption, remained in the care of The Mission at one of The Missions Homes. These were usually boys, as they were more difficult to place than girls, for reasons which are not clear. (It has been suggested that girls were seen to be more pliant and more manageable than boys). The Mission had a number of children's home. Adopters who specifically asked for an older child would have been invited to one of The Mission's Homes to "choose" a child. Prospective adopters would have been shown around one of the Homes to make a choice. The Mission staff usually presented one or two or more children whom they thought might meet with adopters' approval. Potential adopters were sometimes invited to wander round the children's home/nursery to choose a child they liked.

The Homeless Children's Aid and Adoption Society:

The Homeless Children's Aid and Adoption Agency and F.B. Meyer Children's Home (HCAAS) was established in 1920 and was based first in Wood Green, North London and then at 54, Grove Avenue, Muswell Hill, North London, London N10, from the summer of 1946. The HCAAS also had offices at 93 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1. The HCAAS had close links with The Mission of Hope. The Founder of the HCAAS, Dr F.B. Meyer worked with The Mission of Hope until he decided to set up his own adoption agency in 1920. It was well known nationally at the time, especially to the Protestant Church. It placed children with adopters around the country. As the numbers of adoptions began to decrease in the latter part of the 20th Century, the HCAAS merged with The Mission of Hope in 1982, and the organisation later became Christian Family Concern in 1989, when the last children's home closed down. Their archived adoption files were eventually passed to Croydon Council for safekeeping in 1993, when Christian Family Concern ceased being an adoption agency.

Much of what is described above in relation to The Mission of Hope can also be applied to the HCAAS. The biggest difference between the two agencies was that The Mission of Hope had a number of children's homes and a Maternity Unit (Birdhurst Lodge), whereas the HCAAS had only one children's home, Hutchison House, for toddlers. Most babies adopted through The HCAAS did not spend time in residential care, but were placed either direct from the "feeder" Maternity Home or from foster carers.

The HCAAS ran Hutchison House from 1920 until the late 1940s—Hutchison House, Browning Road, Leytonstone. Hutchison House was apparently taken over by the Local Authority in the late 1940s. Hutchison House appears to have been a home for children who had not been placed for adoption as babies. Contemporary images (available for the Vestry House Museum, Waltham Forest and Getty Images) show groups of identically dressed toddlers out for walks with nursing staff, and also in large charabanc style prams and carts around the streets of Walthamstow. Painted signs on the prams and carts advertised that the children were from Hutchison House. All the toddlers wore identical baby clothes, looking like little Pixies.

Luckily, some adoptive parents wanted “older” children and so some of the children at Hutchison House were placed for adoption. Others migrated to other children’s homes at a later age, or were fostered, or were sent to Canada and Australia to working farm communities.

Unlike The Mission of Hope, the HCAAS did not have a maternity unit. It appears to have taken a substantial number of its children for adoption from The Old Hall, (also known as The Mill House) Great Bentley, Essex. However, other birth mothers from around the country were referred to the HCAAS by Ministers, local church organisations, Moral Welfare Workers, and other agencies. A birth mother who wished to place her child through the HCAAS would typically look after her child herself until placement, or place her child in a foster home as a temporary measure. A birth mother or foster carer would be expected to take the baby to the offices of the HCAAS in Westminster Bridge Road (in earlier days) and then later to Wood Green and Muswell Hill.

THE HALL, GREAT BENTLEY, ESSEX 7A/JIB

ALSO KNOWN AS :THE SHADES, THE OLD HALL AND FINALLY (BY 1946) AS THE OLD MILL HOUSE

The HCAAS regularly placed for adoption children born in The Hall, Great Bentley. The Hall was a Privately run Mother and Baby/Maternity Home. It was used by local women as an alternative to giving birth at home or in hospital, and by unmarried women from further afield. Some babies born at the Hall were placed for adoption, either privately or through an Adoption Agency. The Homeless Children’s Aid and Adoption Society was often the preferred choice of the Matron at The Hall.

Sister Ellen J. Bowden was Matron for many years but died in 1967, when the Hall appears to have closed.

Photographs of Sister Bowden and The Hall can be found in local history books in Essex, “Great Bentley Past”—1993 and 1990.

As a Privately run home it was NOT an Adoption Agency.

No records appear to have survived from The Hall. In the Great Bentley Magazine for 1995, Mary Maskell wrote that Sister Bowden's daughter-in-law had told her that all records of babies being born at the home had been destroyed. There were no Statutory requirements at the time to keep records.

Essex Record Office does not appear to have records. Chelmsford Adoption Team may have more knowledge.

ROKEBY

The Mission of Hope and the Anchorage Mission:

54 and 132 Leigham Court Road, Streatham:

Number 54 Leigham Court Road (later re-numbered in October 1930 as number 132) was acquired in 1913 by The Mission of Hope for use as a second Maternity Hospital, a first Maternity Hospital having been opened in 1910 at "The Moorings" 2 Champions Park, Denmark Hill, Camberwell, South London.

A history of The Mission of Hope shows that the impact of the First World War created huge social problems in England and led to a considerable increase in demand for the services of The Mission.

It is said that over 500 young women were admitted into the Mission's Maternity Homes from one munitions factory alone, and the organisation became officially responsible for accommodating pregnant women sent home from France.

In 1922 The Mission received, as a gift, Birdhurst Lodge in South Park Hill Road, South Croydon. This property acted as a "receiving home" for children to be adopted, and also became the new headquarters for The Mission. Rokeby continued as Maternity Home until 1931 when it was closed by The Mission of Hope and its maternity function transferred to Birdhurst Lodge.

Not all the records relating to births at Rokeby have survived, and some were destroyed. Those that do exist relate to children placed for adoption through The Mission or raised in the care of The Mission in one of their children's homes. Records for children adopted through The Mission may be found with Croydon Adoption Team, and those for children in the care of The Mission may be available at the Croydon Local Studies Library, within the main library in Croydon.

When Rokeby was sold by The Mission of Hope in 1931 the building was taken over by The Anchorage Mission (Refuge and Reform) and continued to be a Maternity Home. During the 1920s and 1930s the Matron of The Anchorage Mission at Rokeby was Lydia Banyard, the wife of the Rev. Arthur Charles Banyard, manager of The Anchorage Mission. Lydia Banyard's name can often be seen on the birth certificates of children born at Rokeby during this period.

Birth mothers could remain at Rokeby for up to three months after the birth of their child. Some birth mother's placed their child for adoption by The Mission of Hope or care of The Mission, whilst others made their own arrangements for their child's care. The Matron of Rokeby sometimes made arrangements for the Private adoption of children born at Rokeby.

The Anchorage Mission continued to operate in Leigham Court Road until 1943 when Rokeby was closed and the Maternity Home evacuated to Torquay. After the Second World War, the Anchorage Mission became known as the Children's Aid Society with offices at 55 Leigham Court Road.

On 28 September 1967 the Barnardo's organisation became the Managing Trustees of the Children's Aid Society and in July 1968 the Anchorage Mission, along with other charities, were amalgamated to form a single charity known as "Barnardo's Endowed General Purpose Fund", to support the general activities of Barnardo's.

The surviving records concerning the mothers and children at Rokeby during the period that the home was run by the Anchorage Mission (APPROX. 1931-1943) are held at Barnardo's After Care Centre, Children's Service Department, Tanner's Lane, Barkingside, Ilford, Essex, IG6 1QG.

(I am indebted to John W. Brown from whose history of The Mission of Hope and The Anchorage Mission the above has been extracted)

General:

Twins were notoriously more difficult to place than "singletons", at least until the 1970s. This appears to have been because of financial issues. Adopters usually could not afford to take two children. The Mission and the HCAAS would have made efforts to place twins together but, in the end, often had to separate twins and place them separately. There is evidence to show that when twins were separated for adoption, the adopters of each child were not informed that the child was a twin. However, an original birth certificate is an indicator of whether or not a child was a twin as twins have the time of birth stated on the birth certificate.

Children not eligible for adoption:

The Mission of Hope and the HCAAS would not place children for adoption who were “unhealthy” or “*Epileptics or Tubercular or Feeble-minded*”—quote from Mission of Hope Application Form 1945. Both agencies were also keen to make sure that the child came from a “good” family background, and that there was no hint of racial mix. Children with a dark complexion or red hair were often more difficult to place.

It is not clear when, or if, this policy changed, but it was softened by the 1970s.

Adopted children:

Both The Mission of Hope and the HCAAS were said to encourage adopters to tell their child that they had been adopted as early as possible, though there was no absolute requirement to do so in the early part of the 20th Century, and this very much depended on individual adopters’ preferences. Written advice was not given, but the subject would be raised when the adopters met a worker from the adoption agency.

Some adopters did not tell their child that she/he had been adopted. A child might be told by another family member, or by a friend in a schoolyard—sometimes adoption was a badly kept secret—or not at all.

Some adopted adults managed to get through their lives without ever finding out that they had been adopted, especially if they never applied for a copy of their original “long” birth certificate, on which the word “adopted” would be annotated on the right hand side. Some adopted adults only find out about their adoption after their adopted parents die, or when, say, they need a “long” birth to apply for a passport, etc.

Both The Mission of Hope and the HCAAS tried to keep in touch with the adopted child and the adopters through annual visits, up until the age of 14 years (school leaving age) or, later, 16 years. However, they would not pursue a family if they moved or went abroad, or changed address and did not respond to letters.

Adopted children would have no memorabilia of their birth family, although some birth mothers fitted the child with clothes when placed. The adoptive family often sent them back to The Mission, and the HCAAS asked adoptive families to bring travelling clothes for the child when they collected her/him.

Some birth mother’s wrote to the adoption agencies to enquire about the welfare of their child. However, in the early part of the 20th Century, up to the 1970’s, birth mothers were not encouraged to keep in touch with their child through the adoption agency. If they continued to write and ask for news they would be gently advised not to.

Birth Mothers:

Before the 1970s, unmarried mothers experienced a great deal of stigma and embarrassment about being pregnant and not married. The families of unmarried birth mothers were often not supportive and pressured their daughter to place their child for adoption. Birth mothers would often be sent away for their confinement to a relative, or friend, or to a Maternity or Nursing Home, such as The Old Hall, Great Bentley and The Mission of Hope.

A few mothers to be were able to keep their pregnancy a secret from their parents, using extended family or friends as a cover. The father of a mother to be was sometimes not told.

Archived files show that some birth mothers were forced to give up their child for adoption by their parents. In a few cases, there is anecdotal evidence to show that a child might even be taken away without the birth mothers involvement and agreement, with birth grandparents colluding with the adoption agency and the Court to falsify legal consent.

Some parents of mothers- to- be were supportive, but , generally, very little practical and emotional support was available until the 1970s. An unmarried mother- to- be might get some help from her Church or from a Moral Welfare Worker, or extended family. Others were isolated and received little help. The Mission of Hope was able to offer support and some counselling to birth mothers, as set out above, but the HCAAS did not have a maternity unit and usually did not meet with birth mothers, except, sometimes, on the day that the child was handed over for adoption.

Birth mothers often said that they could not afford to parent alone, and did not have a place to take their child, until State Welfare benefits and housing for single parents became available in the late 1960s. Some expressed a wish for their child to have the “benefits” of two parents.

The mothers of some babies placed for adoption became pregnant by an extra marital affair, particularly during war years, or when their husband was away overseas. Marriages were sometimes kept together if the birth mother placed her child for adoption.

It is true to say that all birth mothers grieved for their lost child, even if this was not made explicit. However, not all birth mothers wished to see their child again, as post adoption reunion work has shown.

HANDOVER OF CHILD:

Handover of a child to adoptive parents usually took place at offices of The Mission of Hope and the HCAAS.

At the Mission of Hope, adopters would be invited to collect the child to take home “on a visit”, ie for a trial period, to see if the child matched with the adoptive parents, on the day that the birth mother left The Mission or soon after. Adopters would be asked to arrive after the birth mother had left.

Similarly at the HCAAS---birth mother and adopters might be in the building at the same time, but would be in separate rooms—the child would be handed to the Secretary of the HCAAS who would then hand to the adoptive parents.

Only rarely did adopters meet with birth mothers until the late 1960s and early 1970s when the practice became routine, if both parties agreed.

Putative Birth Father:

A birth father was described as a “putative” or “assumed” birth father if the birth mother said he was the birth father, but his name was not on the birth certificate and he had not claimed paternity in any other way, for example by paying maintenance or by having an Affiliation Order against him.

In earlier days, that is in the early 1900s through the 1940s, if a birth father had not claimed paternity and his name was not on the birth certificate he would be described by Guardians ad Litem (see Glossary for definition) as “not proven” and would not be named.

Some birth mothers refused to name the birth father, whilst others made up a false name, for purposes of decency or to protect the birth father.

Adopter’s preferences:

“Matching” by The Mission of Hope and the HCAAS was done on simple guidance such as gender, age, hair and skin colour, social class, adopters’ preferences, and, sometimes, birth mothers’ requests would be taken into account.

Girls were easier to place for adoption than boys, though it is not clear why. Adopters generally preferred babies to be as young as possible, usually under the age of two years, though a few adopters specifically asked for an older child, either because they did not want to manage a baby or because an older child (older than two years, but usually under five years) fitted into their family profile—“company” for a child of their own, or for the adoptive mother, and, sometimes, in earlier days, because the (older) child was required to work.

Adopter’s usually asked for a white child, with fair skin, and without disabilities or serious illness. Children with dark complexions were more difficult to place. Children with ginger hair were also difficult to place—quote from one adopter’s request for a

child in 1953-- *"We do not mind the sex,--we do not even mind the colour of the hair--even ginger!"* In the event, these adopters, given the choice of two girls, specifically chose the baby with *"blond hair"* rejecting the other child, stating, *"not the one with dark hair"*.

"Adoption" before 1926

The first Adoption of Children Act in England and Wales became law in 1926, a separate Act was made law a little later in Scotland. Before 1926 the word "adoption" had been used commonly to describe informal arrangements for the permanent placement of children into families other than the child's birth family. It was usually supported by an informal agreement. A few legal Adoption Orders were made in the High Court, though this was expensive and so only used by wealthy people of means.

"Adoptions" before 1926, and in some cases later, were more akin to fostering. The "adopted" child may have used the "adoptive" parents name or had their name changed by deed poll. Some children placed before 1926 were legally adopted after 1926. The book "Silas Marner" by George Elliot is a good illustration of how adoptions worked before 1926.

Both The Mission of Hope and the HCAAS were slow to encourage adopters to use the process of legal adoption offered by The Adoption of Children Act 1926. Both agencies felt, at first, that legal adoption was both unnecessary and dangerous, as they thought it might lead to adopters being identified. Indeed, the names and addresses of adoptive parents were shown on Court papers given to the birth mother until anonymised index numbers were introduced into the process in 1949. It was not until the mid- 1930s that adopters were actively encouraged to secure their child through an adoption order.

Adoption agencies, such as The Mission of Hope and the HCAAS, placed children with "adoptive" families, foster parents and in children's homes with the consent of their birth families. Placements with adoptive families were usually supported by an Agreement, which would have had some standing under contract law. However, it was then up to the "adoptive" parents to decide how they fulfilled their functions and settled the child's legal status. Many such children would have grown up with their "adoptive" parents surname but would have legally retained their birth names.

After 1926, when a child was legally adopted, the child's name was added to the Adopted Children's Register held by the Registrar General, and copies of their original birth certificate were annotated with the word "adopted". A legally adopted child was given a new birth certificate in the adoptive parents' surname.

Adopters:

For most of the 20th Century assessment of adopters by The Mission of Hope and the HCAAS was rudimentary. In the early part of the century it was difficult to find people willing to adopt, financial considerations being the main obstacle. Both agencies advertised for adopters in national newspapers and women's magazines. The HCAAS also ran local campaigns in the East End of London, parading children round in charabanc style prams.

As the century went on, from the late 1960s, as abortions became available and state benefits and housing resources increased, more women were able to keep their children. Both agencies bemoaned the fact that fewer children were available for adoption. Part of their mission had been to meet the needs of childless Christian families and to help women who had fallen from the path of righteousness.

In the early part of the century most potential adopters simply had to show that they were financially able to cope with a child, but as the century moved on, both agencies developed various strategies for choosing adopters.

Both agencies were specifically Church of England/Protestant agencies. There were, of course, many other voluntary adoption agencies who met the needs of people from particular religions or with no religion at all.

Adopters were chosen on the basis of an application form, references, and occasionally, but not always, a home visit by a volunteer "visitor" from the agencies. Potential adopters had to show that they were practising Christians. One of their references had to be from the Church which they attended. The closer to the "heart and soul" of the Anglican community they were, the greater their chance of being accepted for placement of a child.

Conclusion:

I hope that this brief summary of the work of these two very large, now closed, adoption agencies helps to give some insight into the work of the agencies over nearly a Century. This summary is probably not complete, as new or rediscovered information emerges all the time. Adopted people and their birth families will, also, always have their own unique experiences to share, which cannot be covered in one place.

This summary also need to be read alongside "Croydon Adoption—FAQs" and the Croydon Council "Glossary Historical Adoptions".