

School leaver put away for skipping school

A SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD Kirkby boy has been allowed home after spending five weeks in the tough Wood End Assessment Centre at Atherton, near Leigh.

The boy (who we can't name) had not committed any offence. He had been put in the 'care' of the local authority — Knowsley Council — for not attending school.

In fact, he had been skipping school for two years, although he was already under a Supervision Order during that time.

But it wasn't until the end of last April — only a month before the boy was due to leave school anyway — that he was taken from his home and sent to Wood End.

The social worker involved apparently justified this useless course of action by saying that the boy had to

Boys roughly treated at Assessment Centre

be made an example of, and there was not enough discipline at home.

Wood End Assessment Centre is about 20 miles from Kirkby and difficult for visitors to get to by public transport.

Boys from 10 to 16 usually spend several weeks there. Depending on the 'assessment' they then either go home on trial, or to a Community School (the old Approved School) or to a children's home.

Not all the boys sent there have committed offences. Many, like the boy from Kirkby, have simply not gone to school.

And yet the conditions at Wood End are harsh. Some of the rules imposed by Superintendent I.B. Williams go much further than is usual in Assessment Centres.

- Mail is interfered with. Incoming letters are opened and read and the boys are questioned about letters they want to send out.
- Only immediate family are allowed to visit on Sunday afternoons. Usually boys are allowed frequent visits from friends and relatives.
- Boys are not allowed to wear their own clothes. Instead, the boys are

forced to wear a semi-uniform of plimsolls, trousers or jeans, and green sweaters.

- Visitors are not allowed to give money or food to the boys. At the end of the visits, the boys are stripped and searched. Again, this is highly unusual in Assessment Centres.

On top of all this, one social worker has been told by an inmate that boys are occasionally knocked about by staff — no doubt an essential part of character assessment and local authority 'care'.

Locally, only Knowsley Council, who take about 100 cases of school non-attendance to court each year, use Wood End regularly. Recent requests from Liverpool City Council for places there have been turned down because the centre was full.



INVESTIGATION of the Birchanger "Body in the Van" case has come to a halt because police have been unable to trace either the van or the body. [Herts & Essex Observer]

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THE ATTENTION of police was attracted to a woman driving along the westbound carriageway of the M4, on the hard shoulder. Attached to the back of the car were two ropes.

Attached to the other end of the ropes was her husband, who was travelling along behind her on a pair of skis.

The couple asked magistrates to consider the venture not as an irresponsible act, but as a "serious scientific experiment."

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THREE TIMES Mr Stephen Callaghan put on his best Scottish accent, walked into a store and shouted "Stick 'em up!" but nobody understood him.

Mr Callaghan then resorted to signals. "Bang, bang" he said, waving his gun at two girls in a newsagent's. They laughed.

The judge at Bedford Crown Court put him on probation for two years. "As a criminal you are thoroughly incompetent," he said.

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A MAN appeared before Macclesfield magistrates for chewing the seat of a new police car, causing £22-worth of damage.

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MISSIONARIES have been blamed for the decreasing number of virgins in Kenya.

[Kenya Daily Nation]

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A CAR components firm in Milan has engaged the services of photographic model Gina Vicari. A date with her will be the weekly reward of the most industrious worker.

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DAVID COPE, a lorry driver from Bexhill, was fined £80 for stealing a bus shelter which was blowing along the A22, having been dislodged in a storm.

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LADY HAILSHAM — who is vice-president of the National Deaf Children's Society — has united with her neighbours to prevent a centre for deaf children being set up in her street.

Her neighbour, Baronet Sir Reginald de Montmorency, said the speech therapy centre would be a "damned nuisance".

"I cannot stand children, mad people and drunks," he said.

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A Social Security sick joke

MRS MARGARET PARRY phoned the SS in Huyton to try and arrange for a visitor and was told that she could expect a visit "sometime next year". The SS official laughed after saying this.

Mrs Parry had a serious abdominal operation three weeks ago and when she came out of hospital her husband left her. In cases of this kind the DHSS policy is to try to get the husband to continue supporting his wife. But in the meantime Mrs Parry has only received £4.40 benefit in three weeks and to get that she had to rise from her sick bed and go to the office in person.

Mrs Parry's daughter-in-law has since contacted CHECK who have arranged a visit for her. In one sense Mrs Parry is lucky because she has her family to fall back on. But there are thousands of other women whose husbands desert them who are not so lucky. The DHSS persist in thinking that women ought to be supported by men.

Degree lesson for graduates

JULY is a big month for final year students at Liverpool University. It's the time they receive their degrees at the Philharmonic Hall.

And July is also a big month for Ravenscroft and Willis, who collect about £5,000 by hiring out gowns for the occasion.

Students pick up the gowns at the beginning of the ceremony, wear them for the big moment of collecting their degrees and are relieved of them as soon as they come off stage, unless they want 'official' photographs. Photographs outside the hall for the family album are not allowed until the gown has been returned.

Ravenscroft and Willis have a monopoly and therefore deal with all the colleges in the city. That explains why their hire charges are so high you might think, but no said the manager of Ravenscroft and Willis "We're the cheapest in the country and we don't want anybody else to know".

Second death forces hospital to act over psychiatric unit

A SECOND DEATH at Fazakerley Hospital has apparently convinced the hospital authorities that psychiatric patients should not be treated on the top floors of a tower block.

David Rowlands, a 19-year-old patient, fell from an eighth floor window on July 4. His death came less than three months after voluntary patient Thomas O'Neill from Kirkby ended his life in the same way (see last issue).

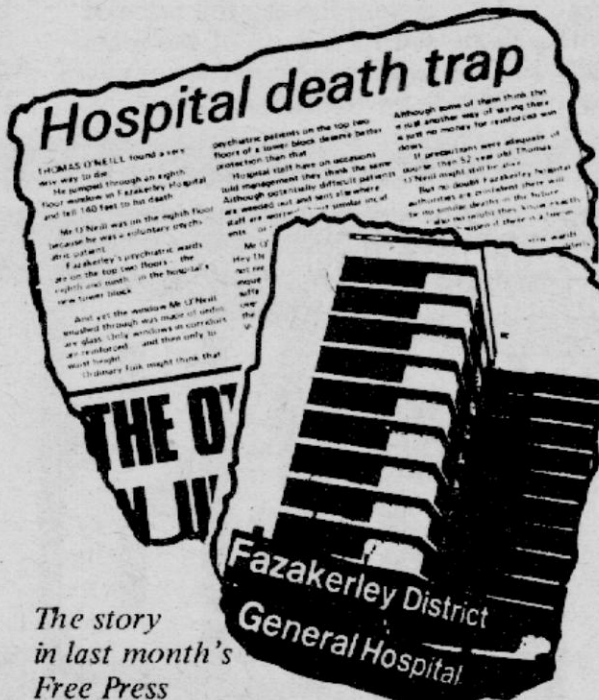
The windows each man fell through were both made of ordinary glass.

And yet the lack of armour-plated windows in Fazakerley Hospital's psychiatric wards had been worrying staff months before either death. The hospital authorities were well aware of the risks to patients and, possibly, nursing staff.

For some reason the psychiatric wards in the two-year-old tower block are on the top two floors — the eighth and ninth. But only a few of the windows on the ninth floor are reinforced, and none on the eighth.

Not surprisingly the National Union of Public Employees has demanded that "all grades of staff be consulted in the design stage in future."

The need for armour-plated glass throughout these wards had been discussed by Sefton Area Health



The story in last month's Free Press

Authority's Psychiatric Division as long ago as January 21.

The meeting heard that the cost of replacing the windows on the ninth floor alone would be an astonishing £120,000.

According to the record of the meeting: "The Division were puzzled as to the original intention of only putting thickened glass into certain windows."

But, they were told, "consideration might be given to housing the psychiatric patients in alternative ground floor accommodation."

The ground floor of the tower block is currently used by the hospital administration.

Union refuse legal aid

THE ELECTRICIANS' union have refused to employ a solicitor to represent men appearing before a disputes committee.

The electricians on the new Head Post Office site at Copperas Hill, Liverpool, eventually paid for their own solicitor to handle their appeal. But, as usual, the decision taken at the original hearing — when they were not legally represented — was not overturned.

Worse, because the men have wasted months going through the "proper procedures", strike action in support of the claim is now pointless. The Post Office job will begin to wind down at the end of August.

The men's claim turned on whether their employer's office in Rodney Street was a "shop" under the Joint Industry Board rules. (The JIB is the industry's governing body, made up of both employers and union.)

If not, Crown House Engineering Ltd, who are based in Manchester, would have to pay a considerable sum in "travelling money". Many of the 36 men would be entitled to back pay at the rate of £2 to £3.50 a day.

Under the JIB's own rules, Crown House appeared

unlikely to qualify. There are, for instance, no full-time staff in Rodney Street to deal with wages problems. The men had ample evidence of this.

But when it went to the original JIB disputes committee in April the men lost. Most unusually, Crown House had employed a lawyer whereas the men only had a local union official.

After this performance, the men were determined to get their own solicitor for the appeal last month. The EPTU refused to pay his bill.

Now they have lost this appeal there remains only the unexciting prospect of a further appeal at national level — though the National Appeals Committee might refuse to consider it.

Ironically, the men discovered during the case that Crown House had not bothered to register their Liverpool office as a "shop" until nine months after the job started. This opens up the possibility of a fresh claim.

But, because the JIB say this is an entirely different case, the electricians will have to start all over again... going through the "proper procedures."

FREE PRESS

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Car workers make time their own

WORKERS in some sections of Vauxhall's Ellesmere Port plant are free of the burden of 'clocking on' and 'clocking off' because the company's clocks are being continually wrecked.

A recent notice from the Car Assembly Production Manager, Mr R. O'Neill, admitted that "as a result of extensive clock vandalism our time recording procedure is out of control".

Mr O'Neill reminded workers that it was not the job of supervisors to record and sign clock cards. "To do so... places a heavy burden on our Foremen," his notice said.

He appealed for help to "overcome our current clocking situation which is of considerable concern to the Company".

Vauxhall's Personnel Manager, Mr D. D. Irons, has also found it necessary to remind workers of the company's rules "due to continuing acts of vandalism with the apparent objective of enabling employees to either clock out early, or to avoid clocking out at all...".

So many clocks have been wrecked so often that management no longer bother to have them repaired. A common method of sabotage has been to put glue on clock cards and leave them in the machine.

Some time ago Vauxhall management thought they had discovered a 'vandal-proof' clock. But their plans came to an abrupt end when their special clock shield disappeared before it could be fitted.