

# The Poor & The Workhouse

Hawkwell Village U3A

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## History of Welfare

- Since the 16thC laws enacted to provide for the poor
- In 1601 Queen Elizabeth passed The Old Poor Law
- Each parish were responsible for looking after their own poor
- They collected money from householders – known as poor rates
- Spent on
  - 'Out' Relief
  - Housing for the 'blameless' poor or elderly
  - Some workhouses – usually bigger parishes



*....but it was all very expensive*

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## **‘Outdoor Relief’ v ‘Indoor Relief’**

***“outdoor relief (or ‘Out-relief’) was assistance in the form of money, food, clothing or goods, given to alleviate poverty without the requirement that the recipient enter an institution.”***

***“Recipients of indoor relief were required to enter a workhouse or poorhouse.”***

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## **History of Welfare**

### **1662 Settlement Act**

- This stated that a person had to have a 'settlement' in order to obtain relief from a parish. This could be secured by:
  - birth in the parish where parents had settlement
  - marriage (in the case of a woman)
  - working in the parish for a year and a day
  - hold parish office
  - rent property more than £10 p.a.
  - pay taxes on a property worth more than “10 p.a.
  - previously received poor relief in that parish
  - have served a full 7 year apprenticeship to a settled resident
- They could be ‘removed’ within 40 days of arrival
- After 1691 give 40 days notice before moving to a parish



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# History of Welfare

## 1662 Settlement Act

- Allowed the parish to eject people from the parish
- The Settlement Laws caused problems because they
  - hindered the free movement of labour
  - prevented men from leaving overpopulated parishes in search of work
  - led to short contracts say 51 weeks.
  - A man might live in a parish for 25 years and still not be eligible
- Not removed from statute books until 1948



# History of Welfare

- Using workhouse could reduce the poor rate by half
- 2,000 workhouses by the 1770s
- Between 20-50 inmates in each
- Typical daily adult workhouse rations in the 1750s:



7oz Meat (without bones)  
2oz Butter  
4oz Cheese  
1lb Bread  
2pts Beer

*Some parishes were more sympathetic towards their poor than others.....*



## 18thC Workhouse Menu

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| BREAKFAST | Women: One pint of tea, with bread and butter.<br>Men, boys and girls: Bread and gruel (of flour and oatmeal) excepting some old men, who are allowed a pint of tea, with bread and butter.  |
| DINNER    | Monday: Pease soup, herbs, &c. with bread; men and women a pint of table-beer; boys about half a pint.<br>Tuesday: Beef and mutton puddings, with vegetables; the beer, &c., same as Monday.<br>Wednesday: Boiled beef and mutton (sometimes pork with it), hard puddings, bread, vegetables, &c.; beer same as before.<br>Thursday: Mutton and beef-suet puddings; beer same as before.<br>Friday: Beef and mutton puddings, with vegetables; beer same as before.<br>Saturday: Irish stew-meat, potatoes, herbs, &c.; beer same as before.<br>Sunday: Boiled beef and mutton (sometimes pork with it), hard puddings, bread; vegetables, &c.; beer same as before. |
| SUPPER    | Women: One pint of tea, with bread and butter or cheese.<br>Men and boys: Bread and butter or cheese; men, one pint of beer or tea each; boys, about half a pint.<br>Girls and small children: Bread and butter; drink, milk and water.  |

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## 'Settlement Examination'

Dorset:

The examination of *Jacob Gibbons*  
now residing in the Parish of *Corfe Castle*  
in the said County, *Labourer* taken  
on his Oath, as to his Settlement, the 2<sup>nd</sup>  
day of *April* 1825 before us, two of His  
Majesty's Justices of the Peace, of and for the said County


Who saith, that he was Born as he has heard and believes, within the  
Parish of *Broadmayne* in the County of *Dorset*  
and is of the age of *Sixty one* Years, or thereabouts, Says  
that when he was about 14 years old he hired himself to Farmer *Washier* of  
*Broadmayne* for a year at about £4 wages that he served Mr. *Washier* in  
house that year, received his wages, continued in his service and served his Master  
7 years afterwards and that his <sup>second</sup> year Examination then worked about for  
different people for short periods only about one year and a half when he hired  
himself to Mr. *Hardy* of *Comington* for a year at the wages of £5 which year he  
served and was paid his wages, that he then went to *Corfe Castle* and worked at the  
Clay pits for Mr. *Pike* as a weekly labourer sometimes and afterwards by the yard for about  
2 years when he went into the Army and served his Majesty about 9 years that when

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## 'Settlement Certificate'

(No. 45)

R. B.



*Suppld (twit)* WE the Church-wardens and Overseers of the Poor of the Parish of *Sturminster* in the said County do hereby certify, own and acknowledge *John Pellard and Sarah his Wife*

to be *our* Inhabitant legally settled in the said Parish of *Sturminster* In witness whereof we have hereunto set our Hands and Seals the *twentieth* Day of *October* in the Year of our Lord *1786*

Attested by *Wm. Hargreaves*  
*John Carter*  
*Wm. Hargreaves*  
*John Carter*

*The Churchwardens, Overseers of the Poor of the Parish of Sturminster, do hereby certify, own and acknowledge*

WE whose Names are hereunto subscribed, of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace in and for the County of *Somerset* aforefaid, do allow of the above-written Certificate. And we do also certify,

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## 'Removal Order'

SOMERSET. ) To the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor of the Parish of *East Brent*  
 To Wit. ) in the said County, to execute and convey: And to the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor of the Parish of *Bramminster* in the said County of *Dorset* to receive and obey,

FORASMUCH as complaint hath been made unto us, whose Names are hereunto set and Seals affixed, being two of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace in and for the said County of Somerset, (one of us of the Quorum) by the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor of the said Parish of *East Brent* in the said County of Somerset,

That *John Brown and Priscilla his wife*

have come to inhabit in the said last mentioned Parish, contrary to Law, not having any way gained a legal Settlement there, nor produced any Certificate owing *them* to be settled elsewhere, and *are* become chargeable thereto,

We, the said Justices, upon due proof thereof made before us as well upon the Examination of the said *John Brown*

upon Oath, as otherwise, and likewise upon due Consideration had on the Premises, do adjudge the same to be true; and we do likewise adjudge, that the lawful Settlement of *them* the said *John Brown and Priscilla his wife* is in the said Parish of *Bramminster* - in the said County of *Dorset* -

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## Poor Law Unions

- In 1834 parishes were grouped into Poor Law Unions
- Collection of say 20-30 parishes
- Each Union run by a Board of Guardians
- Day-to-day management of workhouse supervised by a workhouse master & matron
- Large workhouse – deterrents
- Uniform across the country
- Monotonous with strict rules



*Things changed in 1834  
with the creation of the  
poor law commission*

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## Union Workhouses

- Entry was voluntary
- Supposed to be the whole family went in together
- Formal entry and discharge procedures
  - Medical
  - Given workhouse uniform
  - Leave at any time with permission
  - Would be charged with stealing if took uniform
  - Classified and segregated
  - Little contact with other groups



*Things got better over time e.g. elderly got books and  
snuff, but it was always regarded with 'shame' to  
have to resort to the workhouse*

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**DERBY DAILY TELEGRAPH  
18 DECEMBER 1894**

**PAWNING HER CORK LEG.**

It was discovered at the roll-call of inmates of a Union near Liverpool, last week, that one woman had pawned a cork leg for 4s. As the Board had paid some £8 for the limb they were wroth, but the lady Guardians sent out and redeemed the missing member for 4s 4d. It was agreed to stamp the Union mark on cork legs in future, and to warn pawnbrokers that they will receive such strange pledges at their peril.

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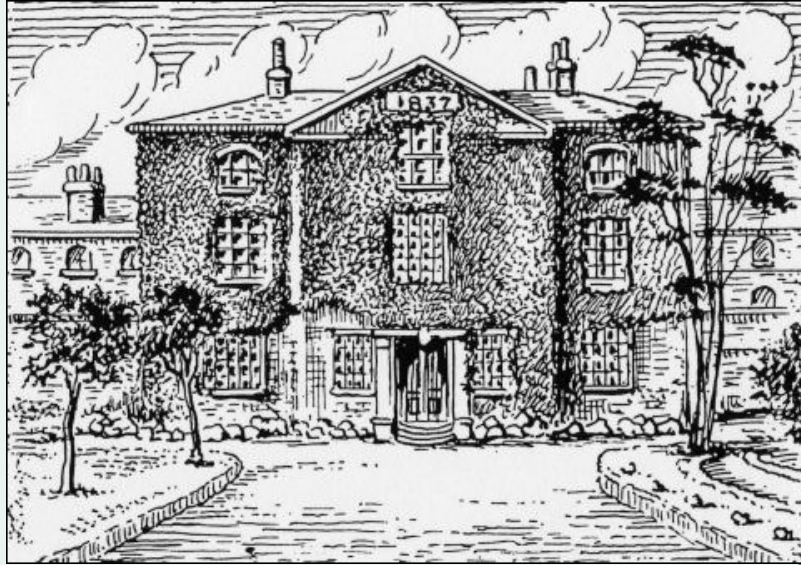
## Workhouse Life post-1834



▪ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SeiyN\\_TEE0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SeiyN_TEE0)

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## Rochford Workhouse







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Southend Standard 12 Sept 1889

### Rochford Union.

#### CONTRACT FOR BREAD FOR THE WORKHOUSE AND FIRST DISTRICT.

**T**HE Guardians invite further Tenders for supplying the Union Workhouse and First District with BREAD, for 13 weeks from the 29th day of September, 1889.

Information as to quantity, &c., with form of Tender, may be obtained at my office at Southend.

The Tenders must be properly filled up, signed and delivered under seal at my said office, or at the Workhouse, at Rochford, not later than ten o'clock in the morning of Tuesday, the 17th day of September inst., with samples of the bread.

Tenders on any other form, or not complying with the above requirements, will not be accepted.

The Guardians do not pledge themselves to accept the lowest or any Tender.

By order,

**WILLIAM GREGSON,**  
Clerk.

Southend,  
4th September, 1889.

Essex Standard 30 Dec 1899

### CHRISTMAS AT ROCHFORD WORKHOUSE.

Christmas Day was celebrated in the usual festive manner at Rochford Workhouse, and the Master and Matron, Mr. and Mrs. Collins, did everything possible to make the inmates happy. The Guardians had sanctioned special fare for the day, and, in addition, a number of gifts were received, notably a consignment of rabbits from Mr. James Tabor, J.P., a quantity of tobacco from Mr. H. Rankin, J.P., two guineas from Mr. George Allen, sugar, tobacco, etc., from Mr. G. T. G. Wright, and toys, etc., from Miss Stilwell. At the meeting of the Board before Christmas the Rev. T. F. Minchin asked if the Guardians might spend a week in the House at Christmas time? To this the Chairman, Mr. S. S. Baker, replied in the affirmative; and soon afterwards several of the members were introduced by the Matron to a specimen of "the Workhouse pudding," steaming hot, and which they apparently relished.—On Christmas morning the inmates started with a breakfast of bread and butter and coffee. At 9 o'clock a cheerful service was held in the Workhouse Chapel, which was prettily decorated. The inmates joined heartily in the

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Chelmsford Chronicle 12 July 1895

# ROCHFORD WORKHOUSE MASTER TO RESIGN.

As a result of the official inquiry the Local Government Board have directed that Mr. R. F. Moss, the master of the Rochford Workhouse, be asked to send in his resignation.

*"Vermin on the  
bodies of patients  
and other inmates"*

Chelmsford Chronicle 4 June 1897

# ATTEMPTED SUICIDE BY THE ROCHFORD WORKHOUSE MASTER.

It will be remembered that about three weeks ago some scandals were reported at the Rochford Workhouse. The result of an investigation was that the Guardians requested the resignations of the master (Mr. Z. Paxman) and his wife, the matron. Comparatively recently Mr. Paxman superseded Mr. Moss, who resigned after a Local Government Board inquiry. In the ordinary course, Mr. Paxman's resignation would have taken effect in the early part of the present week, but on Thursday night he tried to settle the matter for himself by taking an overdose of opium. The porter of the Workhouse found his principal in the office in a comatose state, and at once raised an alarm. Fortunately the Medical Officer of the Workhouse

SHOCKING DISCLOSURES  
AT ROCHFORD WORKHOUSE.  
THE MASTER DOES NOT RESIGN AND IS  
TO BE SUSPENDED.

*"for alleged  
drunkenness and  
other offences"*

*"not fit for a  
pig!"*

*"In large groups of enclosed people who were not allowed out, infectious diseases spread like wildfire. For example, in the 1880s in a workhouse in Kent, it was found that in a child population of one hundred and fifty-four, only three children did not have tuberculosis."*

— Jennifer Worth, *Shadows of the Workhouse*





## More Information

Most comprehensive website on the subject is:

[www.workhouses.org.uk](http://www.workhouses.org.uk)



The screenshot shows the homepage of 'The Workhouse' website. The header includes the title 'The Workhouse' with the tagline 'The story of an institution...', a language selector, a Google search bar, and social media links for Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Email. A navigation menu on the left lists various topics such as Home page, Introduction, Poor Laws, Workhouse Locations, Workhouse Life, Staff & Administration, Workhouse Rules, Workhouse Memories, Workhouse Buildings, The MAB, Other Establishments, Children & Education, Migration & Emigration, and Tramps and Vagrants. The main content area features a list of three featured links: 'Find Birth Certificates', 'Free UK Census Search', and 'Street View My House'. Below this list is a historical illustration of a group of people standing in front of a large, multi-story brick building, which is identified as a workhouse. To the right of the illustration, a paragraph of text describes the website's focus on the Victorian world of Oliver Twist and its dedication to the workhouse's history, including its building, inmates, staff, and poets.

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## Questions



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