

# A Look at Ashton Union Workhouse 1837-1869



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# Preface

We have endeavoured to do justice to the men and women of the Ashton Union and Workhouse, both paupers and staff. Our efforts have been hampered, however, by a lack of original material. In using alternative sources such as the minutes of the Board of Guardians and local newspapers of the period, we hope that this deficiency can be partially remedied.

Every historical enquiry is an act of interpretation, bound and constrained by its own set of biases and subjective understanding. In this project, therefore, we have tried to let the original sources 'speak' for themselves.

What has emerged is the attitude of Victorian society towards the 'undeserving poor.' The suffering of many paupers was immense, encompassing the separation of families, illness, starvation and a loss of personal dignity. Whatever we may think of modern society, we must surely feel thankful that such a system has long gone. Of course, there were some compassionate guardians, masters and staff, but their actions were severely curtailed by the Poor Law Board and its dictates.

We hope that you find our research of interest. We cannot use the term 'enjoy' as there is too much hardship and adversity contained within the material. All we can do is let the poor speak and listen to what they have to say.

*'Over the stones, rattle his bones, he's only a pauper, whom nobody owns'*

***The Pauper's Drive, Thomas Noel (1841)***



# The Song of the Shirt

This abridged extract from the poem by Thomas Hood (1799-1845) was written in protest at the appalling working conditions of the Victorian poor. The piece was based on a real incident in which a London widow, working long hours sewing clothes in her home from materials provided by her employer, became so desperate for food for her starving children that she was forced to pawn this supply. She did not have the money to redeem the items and was charged with a crime, ending up in the workhouse.

*With fingers weary and worn,  
With eyelids heavy and red,  
A woman sat, in unwomanly rags,  
Plying her needle and thread—  
Stitch! stitch! stitch!  
In poverty, hunger, and dirt,  
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch  
She sang the “Song of the Shirt.”*

*“Work—work—work,  
Till the brain begins to swim;  
Work—work—work  
Till the eyes are heavy and dim!  
Seam, and gusset, and band,  
Band, and gusset, and seam,  
Till over the buttons I fall asleep,  
And sew them on in a dream!*

*“Oh Men, with Sisters dear!  
Oh, men, with Mothers and Wives!  
It is not linen you’re wearing out,  
But human creatures’ lives! Stitch-  
stitch-stitch,  
In poverty, hunger and dirt,  
Sewing at once, with a double thread, A  
Shroud as well as a Shirt.*

*“Work-work-work!”  
My labour never flags;  
And what are its wages? A bed of straw,  
A crust of bread – and rags.  
That shattered roof – this naked floor-A  
table – a broken chair –  
And a wall so blank, my shadow I thank  
For sometimes falling there!*

*With fingers weary and worn,  
With eyelids heavy and red,  
A woman sat in unwomanly rags,  
Plying her needle and thread –  
Stitch! stitch! stitch!  
In poverty, hunger and dirt,  
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch,  
Would that its tone could reach the Rich!–  
She sang this “Song of the Shirt!”*



# THE SONG OF THE SHIRT

BY THOMAS HOOD, ESQ.

With fingers weary and worn, with eye-lids heavy and red,  
A woman sat in un-womanly rags, plying her needle and thread.  
Stitch, stitch, stitch—in poverty, hunger, and dirt,  
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch, she sung the "Song  
of the Shirt."

Work, work, work, while the cock is crowing aloof,  
And work, work, work, till the stars shine through the roof.  
It's oh, to be a slave along with the turbaned Turk,  
Where woman has never a soul to save, if this is Christian  
work.

Work, work, work, till the brain begins to swim,  
Work, work, work, till the eyes are heavy and dim ;  
Seam, and gusset, and band, band and gusset, and seam,  
Till over the buttons I fall asleep, and sew them on in a dream,

O, men, with sisters dear, O, men, with mothers and wives,  
It is not linen you're wearing out, but human creatures' lives.  
Stitch, stitch, stitch, in poverty, hunger, and dirt,  
Sewing at once, with a double thread, a shroud, as well as a  
shirt.

But why do I talk of Death, that phantom of grisly bone ?  
I hardly fear his terrible shape, it seems so like my own.  
Because of the fasts I keep—O, God, that bread should be so  
dear,  
And human lives so cheap.

With fingers weary and worn, with eye-lids heavy and red,  
A woman sat in un-womanly rags, plying her needle and  
thread.  
Stitch, stitch, stitch, in poverty, hunger, and dirt,  
Would that its tone could reach the rich, she sung the "Song  
of the Shirt."

J. Andrews, Printer, 38 Chatham St., N. Y.

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Stockport Local Heritage Library

The staff at Manchester Archives+

The National Workhouse Museum

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# Statement of Purpose

The roots of this project lie in a debate about Ashton Workhouse and the lack of any surviving minutes recording the details of its administration. These records were sadly destroyed in the 1940s. What we do have, however, are the minutes of the Ashton Poor Law Guardians from 1837 to 1930. A discussion subsequently ensued amongst us all, and we decided to delve into the archives and retrieve a selection of the aforementioned documents to see what secrets they might reveal about life in the workhouse. We were fascinated to read about the administration, finance, guardians and staffing of this institution. Unfortunately, however, there was a dearth of information about individual inmates. Nevertheless, we found the minutes so interesting as a primary source that we decided to place them much more firmly in the public domain, in the form of a source book. Then began the task of sifting through all the information from 1837, just after the new Poor Law was introduced and when our collection of minutes to 1869 commences. We felt the latter to be a natural cut-off date as new legislation during the 1870s began to change the face of the earlier Victorian workhouse. Our selection criteria included major events in the workhouse, incidents involving inmates and the construction of the new buildings in 1850 and the new hospital in 1866. Quirky agenda items and anything else we found fascinating, we included on the basis that our readers would find such material just as engaging.

We hope that everyone who reads this will be as interested as we are in the life of Ashton Workhouse, an institution whose influence can be felt even today, despite the long passage of time, especially with regard to the endemic attitudes towards the poor and marginalized that pervade contemporary discussions of caring for the most vulnerable in our society.

To supplement the minutes, we have found newspapers of the period to be invaluable, especially the Ashton Reporter. The detail of reporting and the influence of the newspaper in the absence of social media cannot be underestimated. Where we have used extracts, these are clearly marked in the sources. To contextualise our discussion and selected passages relating to the workhouse, we have included excerpts from other publications comprising items of general historical interest drawn from the period in question.

We have tried as far as possible in our transcription to be faithful to the original sources. Any remaining errors are our own.

# The Poor Law and the Workhouse

The Victorians were, on the whole, firm believers in the principle of 'self-help' as opposed to state aid, so that, albeit unintentionally at times, there tended to be a punitive element to the establishment and running of the workhouse.

The prevailing view was that people should be able to lift themselves out of poverty. The Poor Law Commissioners insisted that this attitude arose from 'fraud, indolence and improvidence,' and that the workhouse was a necessary evil. There was a feeling amongst many in society that high wages encouraged laziness, a lack of initiative and unhealthy living – it was only with low pay that the poor could be forced to work and submit to their 'betters.' Another misapprehension was that there was always employment to be found if one made the effort. Thankfully there were some enlightened reformers of the period who actively campaigned against the harshness of the poor law system.

*'But for the first forty years of this century [nineteenth] almost every workman and every labourer expected to go there sooner or later. Thus the hatred of the Poor Law was well founded. Its dreary punishment would fall, it was believed, not upon the idle merely, but upon the working people, who by no thrift could save, nor by any industry provide for the future, when disease and age should overtake them. He has no heart who does not sympathize with the hatred of the Poor Law, as the poor then understood it.'*

**Life of Joseph Rayner Stephens, Preacher and Political Orator, George Jacob Holyoake (1881)**

The whole question of poverty and pauperism\* was also actively debated in Parliament and a number of theories were circulated and debated, such as 'An Essay on the Principle of Population' by the Reverend Thomas Malthus, a tract published in 1798 exploring the relationship between population growth and the rise in destitution. Works of this nature strongly influenced social theory and practice in the Victorian era. How to distinguish between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor was a hotly debated topic amongst politicians.

\*Terms marked with an asterisk can be found in the glossary.

The early workhouse, an institution dating from the early 1600s, was a low-key affair funded by the parish, where the starving and desperate could be housed, clothed and fed in exchange for work. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was up to individual parishes whether they operated such a facility and how it was run. Throughout this period, however, most of the poor rate was spent on relieving the poor in their own homes through the system of 'out-relief'\* – individual handouts in the form of money, bread, fuel and clothing administered by the overseers of the poor. Some parishes decided not to offer 'out-relief' to what they considered 'able-bodied claimants.' Instead, they were offered a place in the workhouse, knowing that the shame and harsh conditions would deter all but the most destitute. Parish-based poor relief was financed by property taxes known as the poor rates,\* and collected by the Poor Law Guardians after 1834.

**20th June 1846,  
Illustrated London News  
House of Commons, Friday**

The House was very much crowded this evening, and considerable excitement prevailed, Sir R Peel having given notice that he should vindicate himself from the charges made against him, on Monday night, by Mr. Disraeli.

## Royal Commission of 1832

In the spring of 1832 the government set up a Royal Commission of nine influential individuals, including the Bishops of London and Chester, to carry out a detailed survey of the state of Poor Law administration. Twenty-six assistant commissioners visited and collected information from 3000 of the 15,000 parishes. A report was issued in 1834 and the main proposals were:

1. The end of relief to the able-bodied except through 'well-regulated workhouses'
2. That workhouse conditions 'be no better than those of the lowest independent labourer'
3. The grouping together of parishes accessing a single workhouse
4. Administration to be carried out by a new body – the Poor Law Commission

In 1834, the old parish-based system in England and Wales was overturned and replaced by a national and uniform framework of poor relief. There were, however, still some exceptions to this new administrative structure. Parishes and unions run under local acts or the Gilbert's Act\* were excluded, only being incorporated into the national system in the late 1860s.

*'Selfish guardians, brutal masters, negligent doctors, all who killed the paupers\* speedily by insolence, privation or indignity and buried them cheaply, the new poor law elevated into economists in the ratepayers' interest.'*

***Life of Joseph Rayner Stephens, preacher and political orator, George Jacob Holyoake (1881)***

As a result of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834, Poor Law Unions were created throughout the country. These bodies consisted of a number of parishes centred on a town and were managed by an elected Board of Guardians. The voters were the ratepayers and elections were to be held annually.

The legislation attempted to maintain a fine balance between providing for the poor and saving money for the ratepayers. In the early to mid-nineteenth century, however, there was a large migration of workers from the countryside to the towns, and in times of hardship this meant that there were many more people to support in a union. To reduce the burden of the poor rate, the settlement laws enshrined in the Poor Law Amendment Act meant that paupers were to be removed from where they lived to their place of settlement, namely the parish to which they legally belonged by birth or marriage, thus keeping numbers down. No thought was given to how disruptive and distressing this must have been for the paupers.

To decide on the setting of the poor rate for each parish, the average poor relief expenditure over the previous three years was



Poor people coming to a workhouse for food, c. 1840.  
Credit: Wellcome Collection (CC BY 4.0)

estimated. As a result, the poorest parishes – those with the greatest number of people receiving poor relief – generally paid the highest poor rates compared to the wealthier parishes with fewer paupers. The concept of central government funding did not exist. Each union had to be self-sufficient and justify expenditure to the ratepayers.

The legislation was very unpopular. The harsh conditions of the workhouse were deliberately introduced so as to deter applications from those deemed lazy. As a result, the institution became a byword for desperation. Strict regulations governed life inside the walls, separating parents from children and subjecting both to brutal physical labour. Masters and matrons ruled their charges absolutely, controlling every aspect of daily existence in an environment ripe for abuse. Workers lived in constant fear of unemployment or illness, changes in circumstances which would likely necessitate the usage of the workhouse. The new philosophy was punitive and sought to demonise the poor.



## 29<sup>th</sup> September 1835, Chester Courant

CHILD FOUND. – On Friday morning week, a fine child, apparently a day or two old, was found on the canal bank, about a mile and a half from Ashton-under-Line [sic], wrapped in a piece of linen cloth, and a written paper inclosed, with the following inscription, “Remember the new Poor-law Bill.” The child is yet alive, and is now in the Ashton workhouse.

### ***28th April 1860, The Staffordshire Sentinel***

#### **CALCRAFT, THE EXECUTIONER**

It is, we believe, generally supposed that Calcraft, who had been engaged in hanging so many miserable wretches during the last quarter of a century, pursues some other less unenviable calling, whereby he gets his livelihood, when his services as executioner are not called into requisition but such is not the case.

He has a regular salary from the City of London, upon which he lives, and the proceeds of his “engagements” in the country are reckoned as so many additions to his stated income.

He has carried on his present vocation between thirty and forty years; and he has lived in or near a quiet street in the suburbs of London, called “Devizes-street,” for upwards of twenty years.

## **Classification of Inmates**

The Poor Law Commission devised a classification of inmates. Each category was allocated separate accommodation within the facility.

1. Aged or infirm men
2. Able-bodied men, and youths above 13
3. Youths and boys above 7 and below 13
4. Aged or infirm women

5. Able-bodied women and girls above 16
6. Girls above 7 and under 16
7. Children under 7 years of age

The workhouse was not a prison. Inmates chose to enter voluntarily, usually as a last resort. Legally, any man who accepted relief from the poor rate became a pauper and lost his electoral status, if indeed he ever had one.

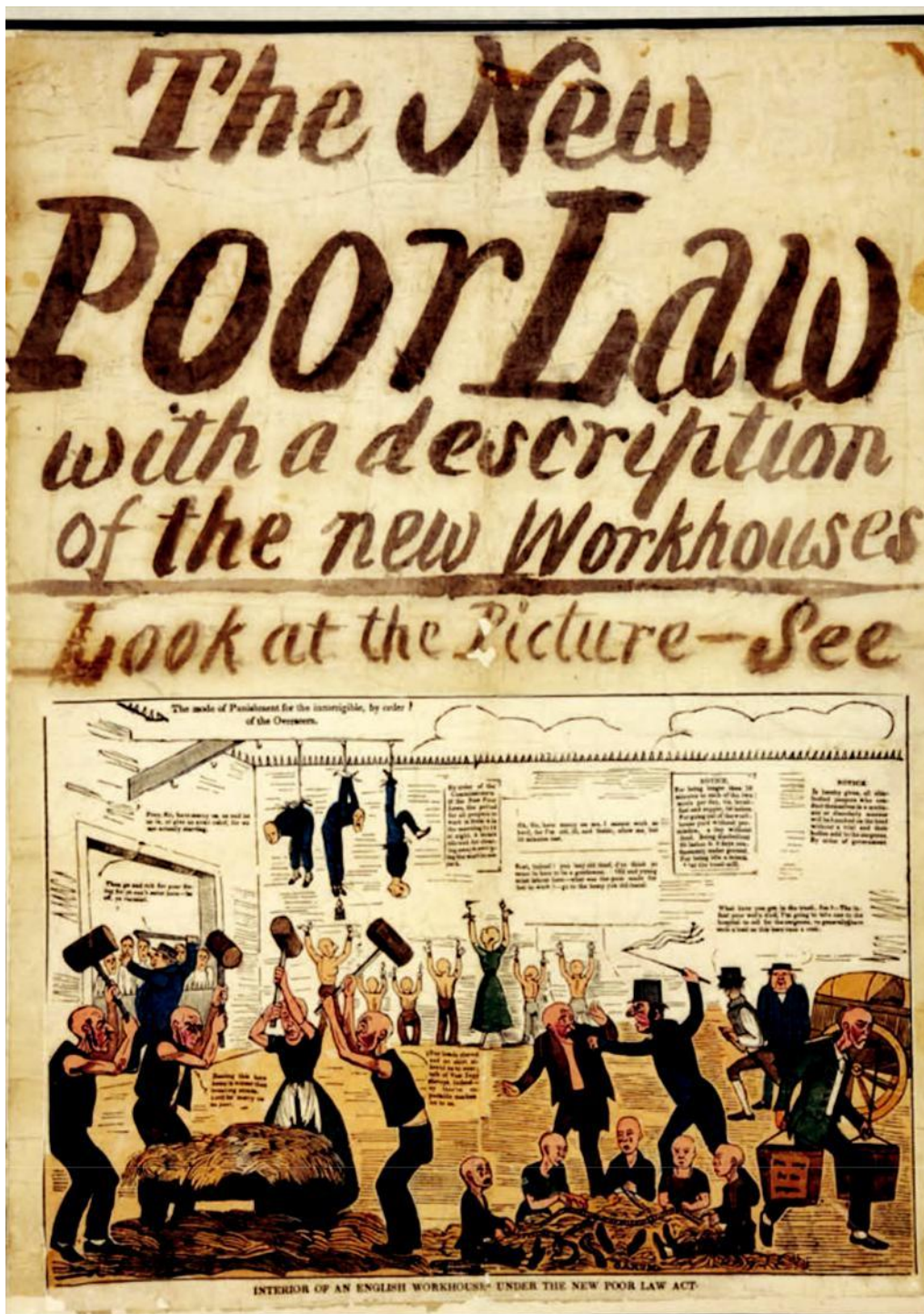
There were three ways to be admitted. Each applicant had to be interviewed by the relieving officer, who was responsible for a number of parishes within the union which he would visit regularly. He had the authority to issue an order of admittance. This could also be supplied by the Board of Guardians, or in the event of a sudden crisis, by the master. New inmates usually spent some time in the receiving ward, where they had a medical inspection and bath. Their own clothes were taken away for disinfecting and stored, and they were provided with the workhouse uniform.

## **Medical Care**

Every union workhouse had some kind of basic facilities for the care of sick inmates, usually in the form of a small infirmary. Although a union was obliged to employ a qualified doctor, early nursing care was almost always carried out by untrained female inmates. Before 1863, not one trained nurse existed in any workhouse infirmary outside London.

In the 1890s, the report of the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor showed how many of the population entered the workhouse in old age. Of those between 70 and 75, 88 out of every 1000 were making use of the institution.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the majority of inmates were not the ‘idle poor’ for whom the union workhouse had originally been envisaged. The population largely comprised the elderly, disabled, chronic sick, those with varying degrees of mental illness, orphaned and abandoned children and women who were unmarried and pregnant, or whose husbands had deserted them.



The New Poor Law with a description of the new Workhouses. Look at the Picture- See (c.1834). A poster advertising the perceived ills of the new legislation. Credit: National Archives

## End of the Workhouse

On the 1st April 1930, the 643 Boards of Guardians were abolished and their responsibilities passed to local authorities.

### **30th December 1843, Illustrated London News**

On the morning of the longest day in the present year many ponds of water in the eastern part of the kingdom were covered in ice; on the morning of the shortest day the thermometer stood at 50, or nearly 24 degrees higher, and primroses are now in full blossom in many places.



# Ashton Union Workhouse

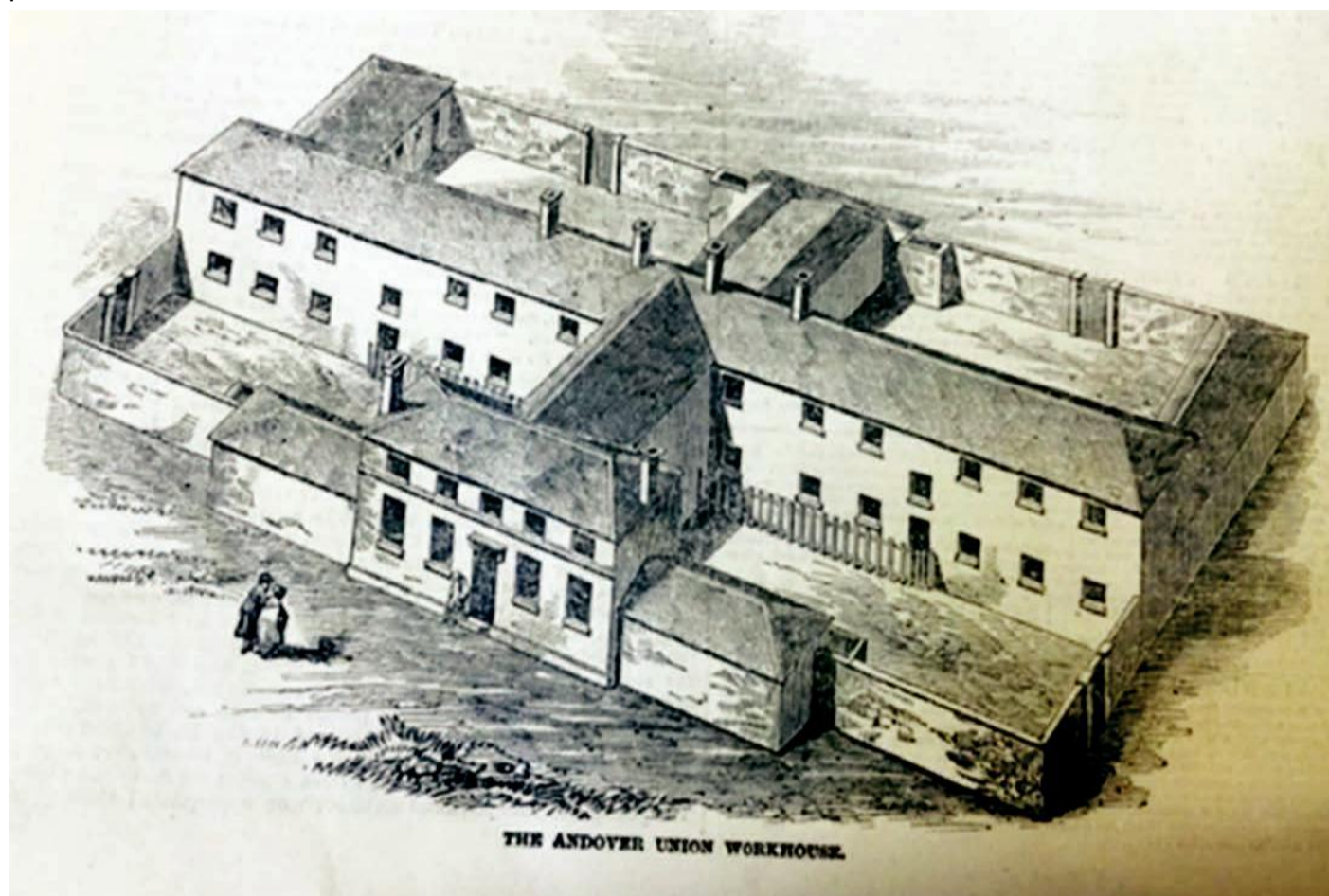
After the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, each Poor Law Union was expected to provide its own workhouse. Existing buildings could be adapted or a new structure erected. The design had to take into account the segregation and classification of inmates and provide uniform facilities.

Between 1835 and 1836, the Poor Law Commission published a number of model plans that could be used by the Poor Law Unions, thus saving them the need to employ an architect. These blueprints included a number of standardised layouts such as the 'square' plan. This formation comprised four wings leading to a central area where the master's accommodation was situated. There was no privacy for the inmates – workhouses were designed to facilitate the observation and control of the paupers.

During this period, there was a rush to construct new buildings, particularly in the south where using the model plans was popular. The poorer and often dissenting north was much slower to provide such facilities.

After 1840 designs tended to move towards individual, architect-designed buildings generally following the 'corridor' plan, where the various quarters such as hospital, entrance and main house were installed as separate units parallel to each other. Designs were often made the subject of competitions, with the winning architect either receiving a fee or a percentage of the total building cost. By 1839, 350 new workhouses had been put up with plans for a further 200.

The original Ashton Workhouse prior to 1834 consisted of several terraced cottages situated on Dungeon Street in the town centre. These proved far from adequate when the Poor Law Union was formally established in 1837 – constitutions were issued and ratified by the Poor Law Commission for this very purpose – and plans for a new structure were discussed by the Board of Guardians. In 1849 the latter interviewed a number of architects and made a final decision on who to employ. A replacement building was finally constructed at Chamber Hills in 1850.



Plan of the Andover Union Workhouse. Illustrated London News (7th November 1846). Credit: Manchester Archives+

The workhouse was an enclosed world for the pauper and usually incorporated the following areas: dormitories, washrooms, workrooms, bake-house, receiving ward, dining halls, hospital and chapel. Within this complex, candles were initially used for illumination, soon to be replaced in the 1860s by gas lighting. Heating was originally generated by coal fires in each room, but gradually these were replaced by a central system involving a coal-fired boiler and a network of hot water pipes, supplemented in some areas by hearths.

Toilet facilities were primitive. A basic privy was usually provided made up of a covered cesspit with central hole, an installation used by a large number of paupers. Dormitories tended to have a communal chamber pot.

### **26th February 1846**

The committee appointed to visit all the parishes and townships in the Union having inspected the workhouse accommodation at this meeting reported as follows:

1. The townships of Godley, Hattersley, Matley and Newton there is no workhouse accommodation of any description.
2. In the townships of Droylsden, Denton, Dukinfield, Haughton, Hollingworth, Mottram, Staley and Tintwistle it has been the custom of the overseer to hire from year to year or for shorter periods one or more tenements or cottages in which a few paupers have been permitted to live rent free, in some cases with additional relief.
3. In Ashton there is a Workhouse belonging to the parish and now used for its paupers and is capable of holding 160 inmates.

Upon inspection of the different workhouse accommodation of the several townships the committee is of opinion that there is none of it available for the purposes of the Union except the workhouse at Ashton and they recommend the Board to convert that workhouse to the general use of the Union. There is no other workhouse accommodation in the Union in any way fit to be used for pauper inmates, it being impossible to place the tenements or cottages occupied in several of the townships under the proper control and superintendence. All the cottages in the several above named townships occupied by paupers, be given up by the respective

overseers and that the Ashton Workhouse be the Poor House of this Union.

### **13th May 1847**

Mr Peacock on behalf of the Workhouse Committee stated that they had not succeeded in obtaining suitable premises for the use of the Union and recommended that the Guardians avail themselves of the premises taken from Mr Bunting a few weeks ago....

Thomas Walton Mellor Esq gave notice that he would at the next meeting move that the Guardians take into their immediate consideration the propriety of erecting a new Workhouse commensurate with the wants and extent of the Union.

### **20th May 1847**

Mr William Heginbottom on behalf of the Workhouse Visiting Committee stated that the Committee had used every exertion to procure suitable premises for the use of the Union but had not succeeded and had been therefore compelled to retake the premises some weeks ago by the Board and they had already taken the necessary steps for making the premises as suitable as possible and he requested that the Board would vote the sum of £10 to be handed over to Mr Baker to pay the workmen engaged in altering the premises their wages.

### **10th June 1847**

Moved by Mr Mellor in pursuance of the notice of motion given by him Moved and Mr William Peacock Seconded that it is desirable to build a new workhouse which was carried unanimously.

Mr William Heginbottom stated on behalf of the workhouse committee that they had made enquiries for premises for fever wards and Mr Thomas Stafford had sent them in the following proposal –

*I propose to send to you 3 houses and cottages fronting Crickety containing upwards of 20 rooms, outbuildings and yard for the term of 2 or 3 years at the yearly rental of £50 0s 0d....*

That they [Workhouse Committee] after consulting with Mr Wood the Medical Officer for the Workhouse had accepted it and wished the Board to confirm the taking of the houses.

### **15th August 1866, Teesdale Mercury**

Carrier Pigeons v. the Telegraph – Although the telegraph lines are now so widely extended, the employment of carrier pigeons is not altogether dispensed with. The Duke of Richmond objects to having Goodwood-park disfigured by posts and wires and consequently the Electric Telegraph Company employ pigeons to convey messages from Goodwood to the telegraph office at Chichester during the races. At the recent meeting thirty pigeons were employed, and the distance of six miles, was flown in about three minutes and a quarter.

Moved by Mr Bayley, Seconded by Mr Adshead and Resolved that the recommendation of the Workhouse Committee be confirmed and received and that the houses be taken for 2 years at a rental of £50 per annum, subject to the approval of the Poor Law Commission.

### **27th January 1848**

The committee have had before them for consideration the proposed plan of enlarging the workhouse by adding the premises belonging to Mr Joseph Fletcher to the workhouse to provide additional accommodation for the reception of pauper inmates.... The dining room with great difficulty will scarcely accommodate the number daily frequenting it; the kitchen and cooking apparatus are also engaged and scarcely sufficient to provide for the 205 inmates the house is certified to be capable of.... The committee consider that to attempt to increase the number of inmates and to enlarge the premises by the contemplated addition would only be resorting to an expedient of a temporary kind likely to incur considerable expense....

The attention of the committee has been drawn in making an inspection of the adjoining property to the present state of a street which is only 8 feet wide in the widest part and which runs immediately behind the property in question as well as the entire length of the eastern portion of the workhouse or at least that portion recently added and rented by the Board for the purposes of the Union and which is known as Back Crab street. This narrow passage issued as a receptacle for excrement and every other description of filth and is made a convenience for all the neighbouring houses occupied by the most miserable of the population as lodging houses wherein are to be found congregated the depraved and abandoned of both sexes.

The committee have been compelled to report this to show the Board the impropriety of continuing to occupy the cottages which are part of the property and to urge upon the Guardians to give up possession as soon as ever practicable, because the health of the inmates is endangered by their contiguity to this pestilential nuisance, two of the bed rooms being over the privy common to the whole neighbourhood and consequently dangerous to sleep in, the other rooms being so damp and disagreeable that the bed clothes are brought every morning to a fire to dry before they are again fit for use....

In conclusion the committee though fully impressed with the propriety of extending the premises are after carefully enquiring into the plans submitted, unanimously determined to give no more encouragement for the expenditure of public money in making additions to the workhouse, as the premises altogether are so inadequate and so ill adapted for the comfortable accommodation of the inmates that their continued occupation is perfectly disgraceful and until better provision is made for the poor the workhouse is inapplicable as a test and the only course now is to give outdoor relief (with very few exceptions) in every case of application however expensive the system may be.

### **24th February 1849, Manchester Courier**

The chairman, Mr. Wimpenny said, he thought it must be the opinion of all present that the erection of a new workhouse, even in a financial point of view, was very desirable. The present house was a disgrace to them, there was not a union in the kingdom with such deficient accommodation. He found that the present house, including repairs cost them £250 per year, and the hospital



### **30th October 1857, *The Lincoln, Rutland, and Stamford Mercury***

Dr. Latham is engaged to edit an edition of Dr. Johnson's Dictionary, in three volumes quarto. The Doctor properly founds his edition on that which last passed under the author's eye – the edition of 1773. This is no light undertaking – it is of the utmost national importance. The Messrs. Longmans are to be the publishers.

establishment charges, which would be avoided by proper accommodation, were £200 per year. The workhouse and hospital were not costing less than £500 per annum.... He calculated that a workhouse with sufficient accommodation would cost them about £10,000. After a few arguments in favour of the motion, he moved 'that it is the deliberate conviction of this board, that increased and improved accommodation for the union is absolutely necessary, as well for the interest of the ratepayers of the union generally, as to enable the guardians to introduce a better classification among the inmates, and more economical arrangements for their bodily comfort and their wellbeing.'

### **30th June 1849, *Manchester Guardian***

Mr Whitaker stated that the gentleman who had been requested to make inquiries concerning the plot spoken of by the guardians as being eligible for the erection of a union workhouse, had made the necessary inquiry of Mr Richmond, the agent of the Earl of Stamford, and found that the plot spoken of was held under leases.... and that the interest of the leases would have to be purchased.

### **1st September 1849, *Manchester Guardian***

After which the chairman said the [workhouse] committee had waited upon Mr Richmond, and made him the same offer that they had previously made for the land for the workhouse which was refused, but Mr Richmond had offered to let them the land for 1d per yard, and £500 to purchase the tenants' rights; and that they must make a road up to the house, for which he would pay them £50. After which the committee called a general meeting of those guardians in the town, when they considered it better to accept the offer; but in the course of the week following, Mr Richmond had drawn up a form of agreement, requiring the guardians to pay the expenses of the transfer of land to them.

This the board did not approve of; and Mr Richmond not being at home, the board adjourned the subject until next week.

### **13th October 1849, *Manchester Guardian***

The report of the workhouse building committee was read, from which it had appeared that they had met, and come to an almost unanimous opinion, that the new house should be made sufficiently large to accommodate 600 persons including children and sick persons, but they considered it better to consult with Mr. Austin, the assistant-commissioner [of the Poor Law Board], as to the number and quantity of rooms it would require before they advertised for plans....



Front doorway showing brass plaque and lights, former Ashton Union workhouse, Fountain Street, Fountain House, previously part of Tameside General Hospital. Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives



**20th October 1849, Manchester Guardian**

It appeared that the building committee had met Mr. Austin, relative to the accommodation necessary to be provided, and that that gentleman had said that it would be sufficient to provide for 500 persons, and that he would certify the same. Mr. Ousey [Master of the Workhouse] ... moved "That 500 be the number of persons provided for by the Ashton union, with workhouse accommodation." In proposing this Mr. Ousey referred to the fact that in all districts where large workhouses had been provided they became more pauperised, and he would like to prevent that if possible.... It was then formally Resolved that the building should not cost more than £10,000.

**10th November 1849, Manchester Courier**

At the meeting of the Board of Guardians, the principal topic of discussion was the best course to be pursued in the erection of the new workhouse. The board agreed to limit the expense for the erection to £6000. A number of architects had interviews with the guardians during the day.

*The architect chosen to design the new workhouse was Mr Edward Nicholson, 18 Princess Street, Manchester.*

**19th January 1850, Manchester Courier**

Ashton-under-Lyne Union –  
A NEW WORKHOUSE – The Guardians of the Ashton-under-Lyne Union hereby give notice that the Plans, Drawings and Specifications for the New Workhouse to be built at Chamber Hill, Ashton-under-Lyne, will, on and after the 24th instant\* be Ready for Inspection. They will then be prepared to receive TENDERS and enter into CONTRACTS for the several works which will be required in the erection and completion of the same according to the said plans and specifications. The plans and sections may be inspected at the office of Mr. Edward Nicholson, the architect, No 18, Princess Street, Manchester, from the said 24th until the third day of January Instant.

Persons desirous of tendering for all or any portion of the works, can have printed quantities on application to Mr Higginbottom, the clerk to the guardians, on or after the 29th instant....

*Josh Higginbottom, Clerk Delamere  
St, Ashton-under-Lyne 14th  
January, 1850*

**2nd February 1850, Manchester Guardian**

The clerk then said that several persons had expressed a wish to be allowed to inspect the plans for the new house at Ashton, and they refused to go to Manchester. This was referred to the committee to consider....

**21st February 1850**

£8,000 borrowed by the New Workhouse Building Committee.

**27th February 1850, Manchester Guardian**

The report of the new workhouse building committee was read, from which it appeared that at a meeting held on Monday last, on the motion of Mr Ousey, Seconded by Mr T.W.Mellor, It was Resolved that the sum of £7,000 should be borrowed, to pay for the erection thereof, and also that the contractors should be allowed to use the clay upon the ground for the sum named in our paper of Saturday week, they agreeing to leave the ground to the satisfaction of the committee.... Mr Maughan was surprised at the amount sought to be borrowed, as the contract for the building was only £5,585. He was informed that the house would cost a considerable sum for furnishing....

The chairman then said he was a little sorry he had not been supplied with the particulars of how many square yards they intended to cover in the new house... he understood they were covering 6000 yards; but he was told by Mr Nicholson that it was about 5000; and if that was the case, he did not consider they had got such a cheap contract as he had been led to believe, for it would amount to about 22s per square yard; while the contract for Oldham was only about 18s.

Contract for building	5585
Good-will for land	500
Amount to be paid to architect	325
Paid for quantities	75
Salary for Clerk of Works	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>6335</b>

**6th March 1850, Manchester Guardian**

The proceedings of the Workhouse Building Committee were then read, from which it appeared that the party who had been requested to examine the new workhouse ground had reported favourably with respect to sinking a well. The contractors, it appeared, had applied for one month longer

time to complete the building, the time being fixed for the key to be delivered on the first of November; but the committee refused to give any extra time.

**20th December 1850, Manchester Guardian**  
The Guardians had to consider how much to insure the New Workhouse for, It was Resolved that it should be no more than £4,000.

**10th May 1850**  
Contractors for the erection of the new Union Workhouse – Messrs. Farrell & Griffiths Builders.

**1st June 1850, Manchester Guardian**  
It was Resolved that the cottages occupied as part of the Workhouse and situated in Crab Street, be given up at the expiration of the year, and also that the lease of the hospital being nearly run out, the same be retaken for one year.

**8th June 1850, Manchester Courier**  
Board of Guardians – The weekly meeting of the board was held on Thursday at the workhouse; Mr A.B. Wimpenny in the chair. Great fault was found with the manner in which the work is being performed at the new workhouse. The board determined that the agreement should be fully carried out, and the spoiled work pulled down.

**15th June 1850, Manchester Guardian**  
Those [minutes] of the new workhouse committee were then read. The committee had inspected the work performed at the new building, and on their return to the board room It was Resolved that the architect be instructed to give the contractors notice to stop the entire works; and that the whole of the brickwork, and part of the stonework, which was not built to the satisfaction of the guardians, be taken down, and made so within one week, or the guardians would proceed to appoint other individuals to complete the works....

**17th October 1850**  
Resolved that the sum of £5 be allowed from the building fund toward a treat to be given to the workmen employed in the erection of the new workhouse and that such sum be handed over to the contractors.

**17th February 1859,  
Brighton Gazette**

The speech of the Emperor  
Napoleon has produced

considerable sensation throughout the whole of Italy. Letters from Milan, Venice, Florence, and Bologna, all agree in considering the words of the Emperor as a pledge for a better future for the Italian peninsular.

**7th December 1850, Manchester Courier**  
Visit of the Salford and Oldham Guardians to the Ashton New Workhouse – On Thurs last, the Ashton Board of Guardians were honoured with a visit by the guardians of the Salford and Oldham Unions, for the purposes of inspecting the new workhouse at Ashton which is fast approaching completion.... The visitors were accompanied to the new house, which is nearly a mile from the town, by a number of the Ashton Guardians, and also by Mr Nicholson, the architect, who having business to attend to at Ashton met them accidentally.

The gentlemen went over the large building and minutely inspected every part, with which they expressed themselves much pleased, especially with the general arrangements and classification of the rooms, etc....

**7th December 1850, Manchester Guardian**  
The dining room, which will also serve as a chapel, is a very fine, spacious apartment. The school rooms are also well arranged, and every room is well ventilated from the ceiling. The site of the building was generally admired on account of it being so elevated and healthy.

**28th June 1851, Manchester Guardian**  
It appeared from the report of the building committee that they had accepted the tender of Messrs. J and J Boothman for painting the new workhouse, and that Messrs. Farrell and Griffiths, the contractors, had agreed to the terms of an agreement respecting the arbitration of the dispute between them and the guardians- that each party are to produce all papers relative to the matters in dispute, that the arbitrators may require.



Tameside General Hospital (Ashton District). Old Ashton Union Workhouse Wing prior to demolition, October 1989.  
Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

**9th August 1851, Manchester Guardian**

A mortgage deed for the advance of a further sum of £2,000 on the new workhouse was produced and was signed by the guardians named therein, or at least as many of them as were present. This sum makes a total of £10,000 borrowed for the erection of that building.

**24th March 1852, Manchester Guardian**

The clerk read the statement of the monies borrowed for the erection of the New Workhouse which was recommended by the building committee to be sent to London for the inspection of the Poor Law Commissioners. Mr Ousey remarked that he was glad to see the report, as the ratepayers who now thought that the house had cost the whole of the money extended, would find that it had only cost a little over £7,000, the remainder being laid out in road making.

**18th September 1852, Manchester Guardian**

The committee were taking steps regarding the lighting of the Workhouse with gas.

**30th April 1853, Manchester Courier**

The board thought it high time that they should be put in possession of the new road leading to the new workhouse from Mossley Road, for which the sum of £500 has been paid to Lord Stamford. The workhouse committee were instructed to look to it.

**14th September 1854**

Letter read from H Fleming assistant secretary of the Poor Law Board.

*I am directed by the Poor Law Board with reference to your letter of the 18th and their reply of the 22nd Ultimo.\* To state that they have had under their consideration the plans for the proposed enlargement of the infirmary at the Ashton-under-Lyne Workhouse.*

*The board observe that it is proposed to erect 8 new sick wards which average 18 feet by 14 feet each. They do not perceive however, what is the object of erecting so many comparatively small wards and unless such an arrangement is necessary, it appears to them desirable in order to facilitate the ventilation of*

*the rooms and for other reasons that the space occupied by the 8 wards should be converted into 4 wards, averaging 28 feet by 18 feet each. The 4 ½ inches more than the 18 feet width of the wards as at present, being added to the respecting new passages, the width of which 3 feet 6 inches is scarcely sufficient.*

*Again, the plans do not show any accommodation for nurses nor any surgery. The former if not the latter is essential. A wash-house too if not already provided is desirable for washing therein infected linen etc., and there should be airing yards for the use of convalescent patients but none are shown in the plan.*

*The board also observe that the position of the tank to receive the soil from the water closets is not indicated, and they recommend as a matter of precaution against the bad smells that may arise therefrom, that it should not be placed nearer than 10 yards to any part of the infirmary.*

*The plans and specification are herewith returned to you and the board request that the Guardians will have such alteration made therein as upon considering the above observations and suggestions they shall deem advisable.*

### **3rd April 1856, Manchester Guardian**

Parish Meeting – On Monday an important meeting of rate payers and owners of property within the parish of Ashton-under-Lyne was held in the vestry-room of the parish church, and by adjournment in the Manor Court House, Ashton-under-Lyne.... an agreement which had been entered into by the church wardens and overseers to sell to Lord Stamford 650 square yards of land or thereabouts, forming, as would be seen by the plan exhibited, the southern portion of the old workhouse plots, for a sum of £100 in money and a new grant forever of the remaining portion of the old workhouse site free from all ground rent or reservations whatsoever. The site of the old workhouse premises occupied altogether about 1,562 square yards of land, comprising two plots of 144 square yards, and 1,418 square yards, the smaller plot having belonged to the parish in time immemorial, and the larger one having been granted a nominal rent to the parish, by an ancestor of the present Lord of the Manor.... Some months past, Lord Stamford had formally

served the churchwardens and overseers with peremptory notice to quit on the alleged ground that the premises granted in 1730 had ceased to be occupied by the poor of the parish of Ashton-under-Lyne.... It was highly desirable that the meeting should consent to the sale...

### **21st March 1857, Ashton Reporter**

TO BE LET, a PORTION of the OLD WORKHOUSE adjoining to Cowhill Lane, consisting of a dwelling-house, several rooms, suitable for workshops or store rooms, and a spacious yard – Apply at the Parish Office, Ashton-under-Lyne.

### **10th December 1857**

Resolved that the workhouse committee be empowered to contract for the erection of two staircases, one for the boys and another for the girls at the entrance to each of their intended day rooms and for making such alterations of walls and doorways as may be necessary for the completing of the arrangement.

### **12th February 1859, Ashton Reporter**

The Workhouse Committee reported that by deepening the well, the supply of water had increased from 79 gallons to 108 gallons in 16 hours, and they wished to have the opinion of the board whether they should continue the sinking; – Mr Mellor said the supply was now equal to the demand, if it would only continue to do so; of course, that could not be guaranteed. They were now obtaining 1,13½ gallons in a week, at a cost of 6d per 1,000. If they had to make use of the corporation water, the cost would be 12s per 1,000 gallons. The matter was then left to the committee whether the well should be made still deeper.

### **9th March 1859, Manchester Guardian**

Mr Mellor then inquired respecting the statements made at the last two meetings concerning the erection of the workhouse; if the committee knew how much they had contracted for, for he had not attended the last two meetings, and he saw from the papers that questions had been raised respecting the contracts and the quantity of flooring, etc. Mr Ousey replied that the plans would be before the board on Monday next, and then the committee would be prepared to report to the board how much they had contracted for; but the reason they had not the plans was, that the architect wanted them to make the



working plans from them; but it was evident that there was to be more than 6,000 square yards in the building, but he was not quite sure if the stable was contracted for. It was also plain that the house would cost £5,000 less than any house in the kingdom where so many were to be accommodated, and in that house each person would have as much room as the poor-law board required them give, about 12 or 13 yards....

**8th March 1862, Manchester Courier**  
*Crab Street in Ashton*

For a great number of years, the above street has been the well-known resort of characters of every kind, both male and female. Scarcely a week has elapsed for a very long time but robberies have been committed there, in some instances to a very serious amount. The Watch Committee have at last, however placed a special watch upon it and the result is that nearly one-half of the street is now unoccupied. On Thursday, some of the occupants, against whom the police have taken processes, which should have been heard before the borough bench yesterday (Friday) decamped, against whom the Chief Constable applied for warrants.

**1861 census for Crab Street**  
**– Occupations of Tenants**

*The heads of household in a number of these dwellings were young unmarried women with boarders:*

Name	Age	Occupation
Mary Hunter	25	Scissor Burnisher
Mary Thurlow	22	Dressmaker
Mary Williamson	22	Cotton Factory Hand
Mary Eagen	22	Cotton Factory Worker
Kitty Marland	25	Cotton Power Loom Weaver

*Records relating to nearby residences indicate that there was an unusually high proportion of lodgers. It is clear that the area suffered greatly from overcrowding.*

**6th April 1863**

A conversation ensued relative to the painting and papering of the Board Room as agreed upon 23rd March 1863 when it was suggested that the Committee Room and Clerk's and Relief Officer's

rooms be attended to at the same time, but it was ultimately Agreed to defer the matter until the new board enters upon its duties.

**31st December 1853,**  
**Illustrated London News**

A large whale, 25 feet in length, has been thrown on shore near Santon Court, Barnstaple. The animal weighs upwards of four tons.

**12th December 1867**

The Workhouse Master reported that Mr Whitehead of Stamford Street Ashton had presented to the House a large print in a gilt frame which he had caused to be suspended in the Dining Room.

*James Whitehead is described as a greengrocer with premises on Old Street and Stamford Street in Slaters Lancashire Trade Directory of 1855.*



OS Map 1863 showing Ashton Union Workhouse.  
Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

**23rd April 1868**

Resolved that the Hospital Building Committee be empowered to see to the erection of the Boys' Washhouses.... in lieu of the present miserable building appropriated to that use and that they be also requested to furnish the Board

with an estimate of the cost of the proposed New Cook-Kitchen at the Workhouse.

Resolved that an application be made to the Poor Law Board for authority to expend a sum not exceeding £500 in completing the boundary wall, erecting boys' washhouses.... and the proposed New Cook-Kitchen and any other minor alterations at the Workhouse that the Board may consider necessary.

### **20th March 1869, Ashton Reporter**

#### *Boiler explosion at the Workhouse*

On Thursday morning, a large boiler used at the workhouse for the preparation of food burst with a loud report, completely shattering the surroundings. Fortunately, no one was near at the time, and therefore the explosion was unattended with serious consequences, and the damage done was slight.

## **New Workhouse Hospital**

### **18th January 1866**

The Workhouse Committee having called the attention of the Board to the inadequate hospital accommodation at the Workhouse, It was Moved by Mr Wright, Seconded by Mr Sandiford, and Resolved that the Chairman [Mr John Bradbury], Messrs Ogden, Sutcliffe, Clay, Hartley, Cook and the Rev C. H. Lomax be appointed a Special Committee to consider the matter and report thereon to the Board.

### **25th January 1866**

The special committee submitted to the Board a tracing of the Workhouse site and the additional land they would recommend to be taken for the proposed new hospital, and after some conversation upon the subject, It was Moved by Mr Hartley, Seconded by Mr Bancroft and unanimously Resolved that an offer be made to Lord Stamford to take the plot of land shown upon the tracing prepared by Mr Hill at 1d a yard, with the addition of that narrow strip on the northerly side square from the entrance of the porter's lodge, a portion of which is at present in the occupation of the Guardians – Moved by Mr Garside, Seconded by Mr Bancroft and Resolved that the Committee be empowered to employ Mr Lindley, Architect, to prepare a plan of the proposed building for the approval of the Board.

The Chairman [Mr John Bradbury] informed the Board that Mr Hill [Lord Stamford's surveyor] had that morning given a verbal intimation that the offer of the Guardians to take an additional plot of land for the addition of a new hospital would be accepted and It was Resolved that the clerk be instructed to forward the tracing submitted at the last meeting to the Poor Law Board with a request that they will, with as little delay as possible, issue an order to the Guardians, to take the land for the above purpose.

### **8th February 1866**

A letter was read from Mr Henry Hall [Lord Stamford's Deputy Steward] stating that the Earl of Stamford accepts the offer of the Guardians for the additional land required by them for a New Hospital as shown by the tracing furnished by Mr Hill, the Guardians, however, to pay the leasehold interest in respect of such portions of the land to be made by the Board.

### **15th February 1866**

A letter was read from the Poor Law Board expressing their satisfaction at the determination of the Guardians to provide additional hospital accommodation for the Union, and requesting to be informed to whom the land taken belongs; and the terms upon which the Guardians will obtain it.

Mr Lindley submitted two fresh pencil sketches of a hospital building but as the number of inmates it was calculated to accommodate was very considerably below that contemplated by the Board, he was requested to prepare another rough sketch of a building to extend the whole length of the land proposed to be taken for the purpose.

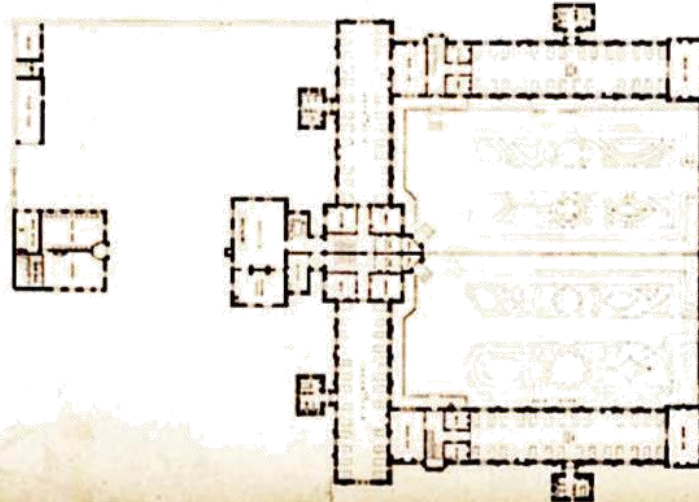
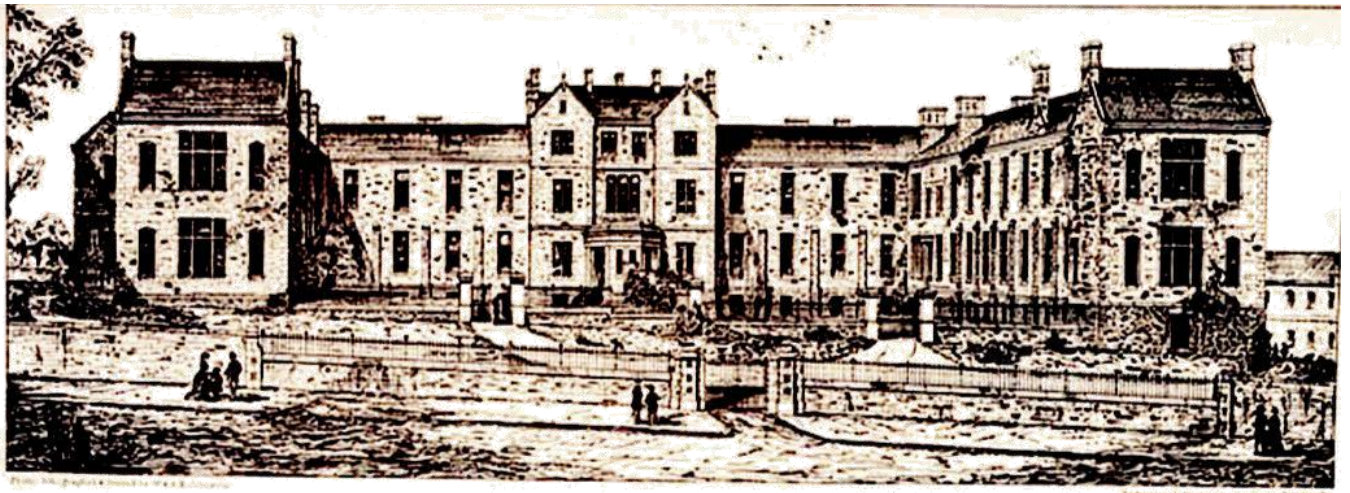
### **22nd February 1866**

A letter was received from the Poor Law Board respecting the taking of land for the proposed New Hospital which the clerk reported he had supplied.

Mr Lindley submitted fresh plans of the proposed New Hospital, and it was found necessary to take a little more land for the purpose....

It was therefore Resolved that a proposal be made to take another 4 yards strip the whole





POOR-HOUSE HOSPITAL, NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE

Poor House Hospital, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Northumberland, England: with floor plan. Photolithograph by W. & A.K. Johnston, 1874.  
Credit: Wellcome Collection

length of the plot on the easterly side, in addition to that shown upon the tracing by Mr Hill.

**1st March 1866**

Mr Lindley attended the meeting again with a pencil sketch of a new Hospital Building to accommodate 150 patients and another providing for 200 patients and It was Agreed to adopt the larger plan and that the building should be of bricks.

Resolved that a proposal be made to Lord Stamford to take 10 yards on the northerly side the entire length of the plot beyond the 6 yards shown as a street, and that Mr Hill be requested to prepare a fresh tracing to be sent to the Poor Law Board, with another form of proposal in time for the next meeting.

Mr Lindley offered to make finished plans, sections and elevations of the proposed New Hospital with specifications and all working drawings at 2½ percent of the cost of the building, and, if employed to superintend the work a further sum of 2 ½ percent.

It was Resolved that Mr Lindley's offer for plans ... be accepted, that allowance to include the sum of £10 agreed to be paid for taking the levels and preparing the plans of the proposed drains and also the several sketches of the New Building already submitted to the Board, but that the arrangement as to the superintendence of the erection be deferred for further consideration.

**22nd March 1866**

The order for raising some additional land for a new Hospital was again submitted for signature. Resolved that in filling up the blanks in the order a sum not exceeding £50 be inserted for the purchase of the Lessees'\* interest and a sum not exceeding £5000 as the cost of erecting the building.

A letter was read from Mr Hill, Lord Stamford's surveyor, giving his estimate of the compensation due to the Lessees' for their interest in the plot of land selected as the New Hospital site, and It was Agreed that Messrs. Ogden and Sutcliffe be requested to see Mr

Hill respecting his estimate, and afterwards to make the best terms they can with Mr Oldham Whittaker for their portion of the plot which is in lease to him.

### **19th April 1866**

Another letter was received from the Poor Law Board enclosing a copy of an Order authorising the Guardians to take certain land and to borrow a sum not exceeding £5,050 for the erection of a Men's Hospital and also forwarding for the signature of the Guardians a form of application to the Public Works Loan Board for an advance....

### **26th April 1866**

A letter was received from the Poor Law Board relative to the proposed Hospital loan, stating that the Public Works Loan Board are not authorised by the Lords Commissioners of her Majesty's Treasury to take a lower rate of interest on loans to Boards of Guardians.... After some conversation It was Resolved that the Clerk be instructed to endeavour to obtain a loan of £4000 from a private source if it can be procured upon more advantageous terms. Resolved that instructions be given to Mr Hall, Lord Stamford's Deputy Steward to prepare a draft conveyance of the land required for a New Hospital to be sent to the Poor Law Board for their approval.

### **3rd May 1866**

The clerk submitted an offer from Mr Robert Howard to lend the Guardians the sum of £4,000 for the erection of a New Hospital repayable by 7 annual instalments....

### **5th May 1866, Ashton Reporter**

With reference to a loan of £5,000 for the purpose of erecting a new hospital at the workhouse, the clerk reported that he had seen Mr Howard, who would lend them £4,000 for seven years at 4 ½ per cent. It was moved that the government offer of £5,000 for ten years, at five per cent be accepted. An amendment was also moved that Mr Howard's offer be accepted.

### **10th May 1866**

The clerk reported that Mr Robert Howard has finally agreed to accept repayment of the sum to be advanced on account of the New Hospital by 8 annual instalments instead of 7 as stated

at the last meeting.... The extended time was considered satisfactory to the Board.

### **31st May 1866**

Recorded that the necessary steps be taken to obtain the money agreed to be borrowed off Mr Robert Howard to be deposited in the Bank to the debit of the Hospital Building Account....

### **25th March 1859, Western Daily Press**

A CAPITAL INVENTION.–  
Mr H. Leonard, of High Street, has invented a kitchener which greatly reduces the consumption of fuel, prevents smoky chimneys, insures cleanliness, while there is an absence of any description of smell. Baking, boiling, roasting, stewing, grilling, and in fact, all modes of cookery can be performed at the same time...

### **21st June 1866**

The clerk reported that Mr Robert Howard had declined to give his approval to the Draft Security for the Hospital loan of £4000 repayable in eight years and that unless the Guardians would repay the money in seven years according to the original offer he was wishful to withdraw from the transaction. It was Agreed that the term be seven years as at first proposal.

### **5th July 1866**

A letter was received from the Poor Law Board returning the draft security for the Hospital sum of £4000 approved and It was Resolved that the Chairman be authorised to affix the Common Seal of the union to the Deed and that the Clerk be instructed to forward it to the Poor Law Board for their seal and registration.

### **19th July 1866**

A discussion ensued as to the desirability of proceeding with the erection of the new Hospital at this advanced period of the building season and as to whether the foundations should be of brick or stone and It was Resolved that the foundations be of bricks and that the clerk be instructed to advertise for Tenders for the excavation and foundations jointly or separately....



Mr Lindley appeared before the Board with the specification for the New Hospital and offered to superintend the excavating and putting in the foundations.... a definite arrangement to his superintendence of the work was deferred.

### **21st July 1866, Ashton Reporter**

The chairman [John Bradbury] reported that Mr J. R. Coulthart, the treasurer to the union, had agreed to bank the £4,000 borrowed for the erection of a new hospital at the workhouse; at five per cent, until the bank rate falls below eight per cent, when he would ask the board to make fresh arrangements. He would be prepared with the necessity security on Saturday.

*John Ross Coulthart was a former Mayor of Ashton and Manager of the Ashton-under-Lyne Savings Bank. Amongst his many other engagements, he also served as Treasurer to the Ashton Corporation for 36 years, in addition to managing the financial affairs of the Union. After a life of public service, he retired to his family estate at Greenlaw, Kirkcudbrightshire in 1883.*

### **26th July 1866**

Five Tenders were received for excavating and outing in the foundation of the New Hospital.

### **2nd August 1866**

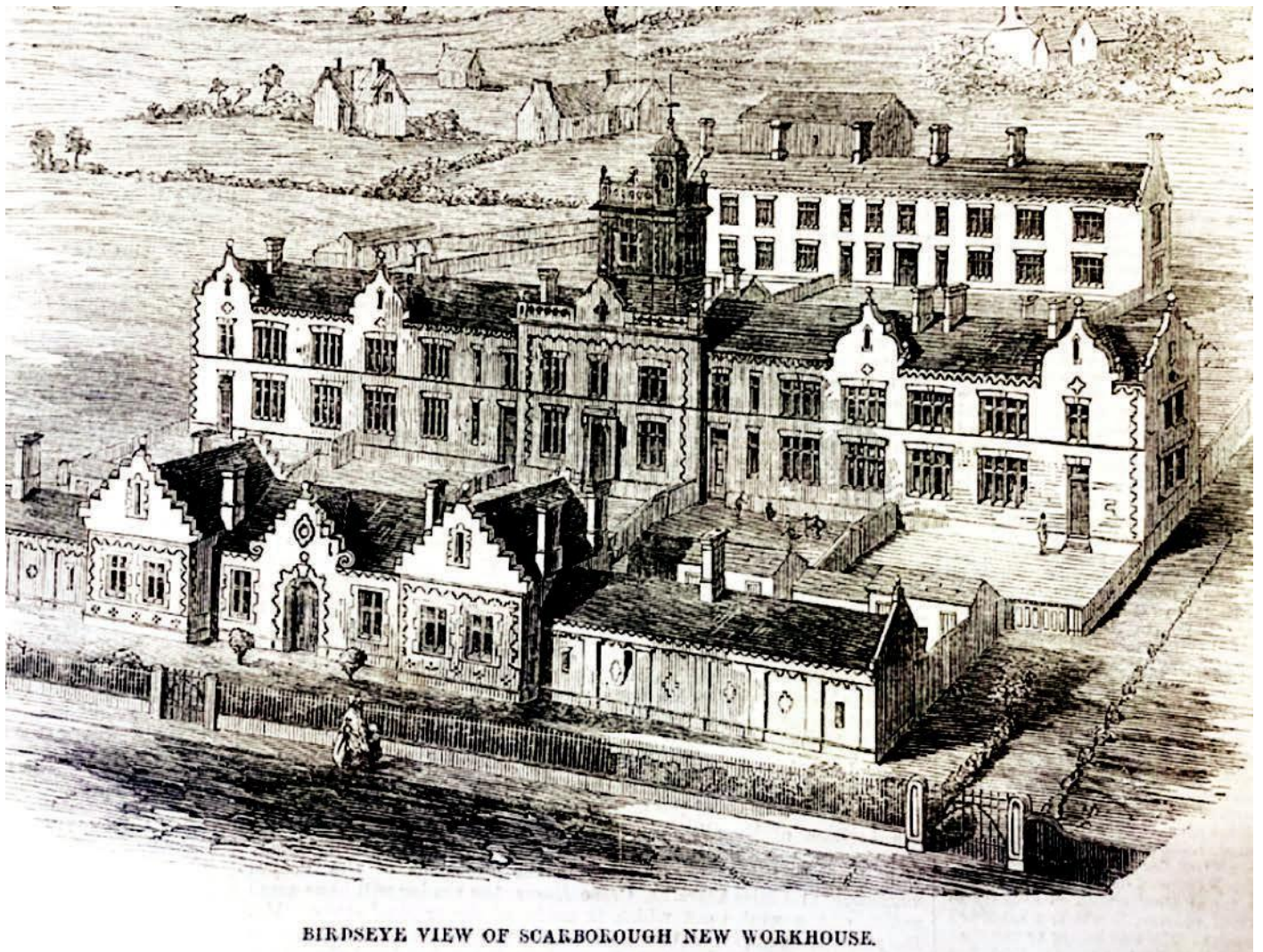
A letter was read from the Poor Law Board which had come to hand on Thursday last returning the draft conveyance of the land proposed to be taken for a New Hospital to be perused and settled by the legal advisor of the Guardians before it can be approved by the Board.

### **30th August 1866**

Resolved that the clerk be instructed to advertise in the three Manchester and local papers of Saturday next for tenders for the whole of the work required in the erection of the proposed New Hospital.

### **1st September 1866, Ashton Reporter**

Builders – The Guardians of Ashton-under-Lyne Workhouse are prepared to receive Tenders for all the work required in the erection of the Workhouse Hospital at Chamber Hills. Specifications may be seen, and a copy of the



BIRDSEYE VIEW OF SCARBOROUGH NEW WORKHOUSE.

quantities obtained at the office of Mr Joseph Lindley, Architect, Market Avenue, Ashton-under-Lyne. Sealed and addressed to the Chairman of the Board of Guardians, endorsed "Tender for New Hospital," must be delivered not later than 9a.m., on Thursday, the 13th day of September next. The Guardians do not pledge to accept the lowest of any tender-By order, Benjamin Seymour, Clerk, Union Offices, Market Place, Ashton August 30th, 1866

**20th September 1866**

Resolved that the Chairman be authorised to affix the Union seal to the contract with Mr Storrs for the erection of the New Hospital when approved by the Building Committee.

**11th October 1866**

Mr Lindley submitted an account amounting to £599 9s 5d according to his own measurement as due to Mr John Wilde for excavating and putting in the foundation of the New Hospital.

**18th October 1866**

Resolved that the clerk be instructed to write to Mr Storrs the contractor for the new Hospital expressing the surprise of the Board that he has not availed himself of the past fortnight of very favourable weather for commencing the erection.

**25th October 1866**

A letter was read from Mr Storrs explaining the cause of his apparent delay in commencing the erection of the New Hospital.

Resolved that the Workhouse Master be instructed to asphalt the top of the hospital foundation wall before Mr Storrs commences the brickwork of the Building.

**20th December 1866**

An 'anonymous Friend of the Poor' had forwarded a number of beautiful Engravings and other suitable pictures for the Hospital and 1lb of tobacco to be distributed amongst the old people on Christmas Day.

**22nd December 1866, Ashton Reporter**

The clerk reported that the new hospital at the workhouse would cost more than the board had obtained permission to expend from the Poor Law Board. They were only authorised to spend £5,050, and the building would cost £5,178, even if there were no extras. The matter was deferred for a week or two.

**24th January 1867**

Another letter was read from the Poor Law Board in reference to the application of the Guardians for authority to expend such further sum as may be absolutely necessary not exceeding £1000 in the erection of the new Workhouse Hospital.

**4th April 1867**

Resolved that the minutes of the Hospital Buildings Committee recommending the acceptance of Mr Wilde's tender for making good the foundation walls and the appointment of a Clerk of Works be adopted and confirmed and that the proposed appointment be advertised in the Manchester Guardian and the Ashton Reporter on Saturday 6th instant.

**11th April 1867**

The Hospital Building Committee submitted to the Board a list of thirty three applicants for the situation of Clerk of Works and pointed out three of the number which they considered to be the most eligible.

It was Resolved that Mr James McNulty of Mossley Rd, Joiner and Builder is hereby appointed Clerk of Works at the New Hospital on a salary of £2 per week, to devote the whole of his time to the service of the Guardians.

**6th June 1867**

Mr Lane, the Poor Law Inspector visited the Workhouse on the 5th instant and in his report thereon stated 'It is much to be desired that the New Hospital should be complete and brought into use with the least possible delay....'

**3rd December 1869, Bicester Herald**

An application is to be made to Parliament next session to lay down a street tramway in Leeds.



### **1st August 1867**

Mr Storrs applied with the Architect's certificate for £1000 on account of his contract for the New Hospital. It was Resolved that a cheque be signed for that amount.

### **23rd July 1862, The Taunton Courier**

Colonel Colt, the inventor of the revolver, died worth about £800,000. His manufactory at Hartford, United States, employs 1,100 hands, and the wages paid there amount to £10,000 per month.

### **22nd August 1867**

The Hospital Board Committee were requested to consider the proposition to put a sky light in the New Hospital corridor which has not been provided for in the specification.

### **29th August 1867**

An estimate was received from Mr Storrs for 3 sky lights for the New Hospital corridor as proposed.

### **26th September 1867**

The Clerk reported that Mr James McNulty the Clerk of the Works at the New Hospital died on Friday last –

It was Agreed that an advertisement be inserted in the Ashton Reporter, the Oldham Standard and the North Cheshire Herald for a suitable man to act in that capacity until the completion of the Building at the same salary of £2 per week, the appointment to take place on Thursday next.

*James McNulty, in tandem with his brother John, operated a building company on Mossley Road, Ashton-under-Lyne. The two constructed and owned a considerable number of properties in the area. James was a curious choice for the position of Clerk of Works, however, having petitioned for bankruptcy on the 11th of August, 1860, on behalf of the firm 'James and John McNulty.'*

### **3rd October 1867**

A letter was read from Mr Storrs stating that he would do his utmost to get the New Hospital completed as soon as possible. Considerable dissatisfaction was expressed that the Building was not in a more forward state towards completion, and It was Agreed that the Clerk be instructed to request the attendance of Mr Storrs at the meeting on Thursday next in order to ascertain something more definite as to when the Building is likely to be completed.

The Board then took into consideration 10 applications for the situation of Clerk of Works at the New Hospital. It was Moved by Mr William Ogden & Seconded by Mr Winstanley that Mr John Schofield of Stalybridge Joiner and Builder.... is hereby appointed to the office at a salary of £2 per week.

After some conversation It was Resolved that the Clerk be instructed to advertise for tenders for the loan of £1000 to complete the New Hospital repayable (with interest thereon half yearly) by 7 annual instalments.

### **10th October 1867**

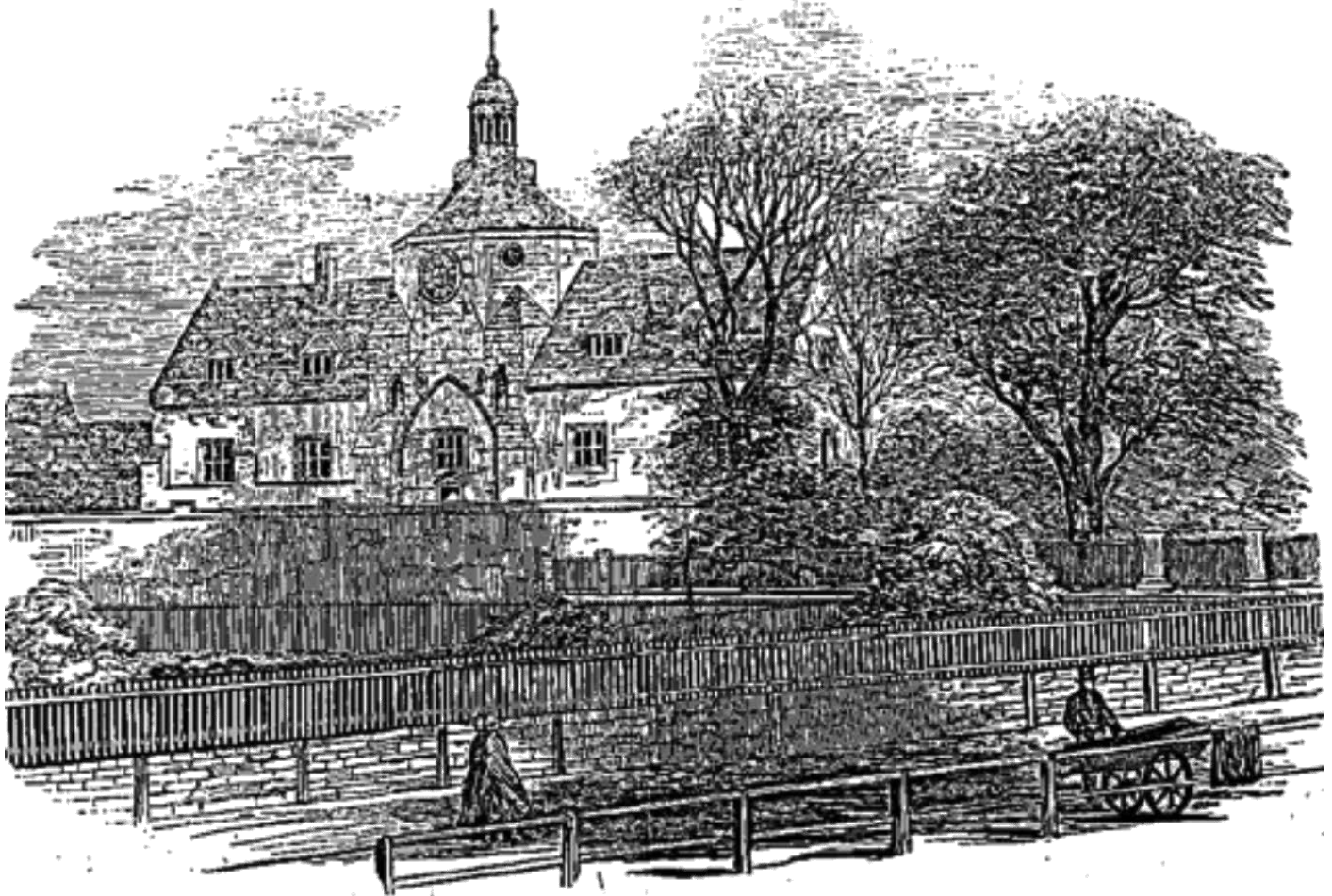
A return was read from the new Clerk of Works of the number of men employed at the new Hospital each day during the past week and Mr Storrs appeared before the Board as required at the last meeting and afterwards had an interview with the Building Committee when he promised to make every exertion in his power to get the New Hospital covered in as speedily as possible.

### **17th October 1867**

Resolved that the Tender from the estate of the late Joseph Whitehead of Crabtree Mill, Oldham to lend the Guardians £1000 repayable by 7 equal instalments to be accepted.

### **31st October 1867**

R B Lane Esq Poor Law Inspector visited the Workhouse on the 24th instant and in his report thereon expressed his satisfaction to find that progress had been made in building the New Hospital the completion of which will he trusts enable the Guardians greatly to improve the condition of the sick and insane and to obviate many of the serious defects now existing in the present Hospital.



THE UNION WORKHOUSE, AT KING'S LYNN.

View of the Union Workhouse at King's Lynn. Credit: Illustrated London News (2nd September 1854). Credit: Manchester Archives+

### **7th November 1867**

Resolved that the Finance Committee be authorised to sign a cheque for £1000 payable to Mr William Storrs the contractor and also one for £30 to Mr Lindley the architect of the New Hospital.

*William Storrs ran a construction company entitled 'William Storrs, Sons and Co.,' from his premises on Tame Street in Stalybridge. He is listed as builder of the town's Aqueduct Saw Mills in the Morris & Co. Trade Directory published in 1874 and was responsible for many others changes in its architectural fabric. Together with the area's most prominent citizens, William committed himself to public service, acting as a justice of the peace and chairman of the Board of Guardians. He also made a foray into politics as a magistrate and councillor. In 1855 he married Sarah Hargrave, with whom he went on to have five children. The couple's third son George Harry Storrs was infamously murdered at Gorse Hall in 1909. The culprit has never been identified. William died in Southport in 1894,*

reportedly suffering from lead poisoning. He is buried at St. Paul's Church, Stalybridge.

### **14th November 1867**

A letter was read from the Poor Law Board calling attention to the great want of increased and improved hospital accommodation in the union and requesting the Guardians to urge on the completion of the new buildings as speedily as possible.

### **5th December 1867**

Mr Lindley reminded the Board that the gas mains, fire grates and other fixtures for the new Hospital now required attention and It was Agreed that the Building Committee meet on Tuesday morning next to proceed to the Workhouse at 10 o'clock for the purpose of considering the various matters referred to by the architect.

### **19th December 1867**

The Revd C.W. Lomax enquired whether as Dr Smith was now appointed Inspector of



Workhouse Hospitals in various parts of the country it might not be desirable to request the Poor Law Board to depute him to pay a visit to our New Hospital to ascertain if he had any suggestions to offer respecting it before its final completion.

### **2nd January 1868**

A letter was also received from Mr R.B. Lane Poor Law Inspector in reply to the question put to him after the last meeting relative to an inspection of our New Hospital, stating that he feels sure that it would be satisfactory to the Guardians if Dr E Smith, the Medical Inspector for the Poor Law Board, were to inspect the new building now near its completion, and that any suggestions from him would be very valuable.

### **6th February 1868**

A letter was read from Dr Smith arranging to visit and inspect our Workhouse Hospital on Thursday the 20th Inst in company with Mr Carne when they will be glad to confer with any of the Guardians who take an interest in the matter.

Resolved that the clerk be instructed to inform Mr Storrs, the contractor for the New Building of the Inspector's intended visit and again urge upon him to send an adequate no. of men and push on with the work in the meantime so that when the Government Inspector comes the Building may be found much nearer completion.

### **27th February 1868**

The Board then proceeded to the election of Hospital Nurses and It was Moved by Mr Knight & Seconded by Mr Wardley that Mr and Mrs Naish of Armley near Leeds, be appointed. The amendment was Moved by Mr Hemingway and Seconded by Mr William Ogden: That Mr and Mrs Shaw of Ashton, be elected. On being put to the meeting there were 8 votes for the amendment and 12 for the original motion – the motion was therefore declared to be carried and It was Resolved that Charles Naish, aged 39 years and his wife Frances, aged 35 years are hereby appointed Nurses at the Workhouse Hospital at a joint salary of £34, being £20 for the Male and £14 for the Female with board and lodging.

The question of heating the New Hospital premises was then introduced and It was Agreed that the clerk be instructed to get an advertisement inserted in the three Ashton papers and the North Cheshire Herald intimating that the Guardians are desirous of receiving suggestions as to the best mode of heating their New Hospital, and to receive Tenders on or before Wednesday the 18th.

### **5th March 1868**

An application was received from Mr Storrs supported by the architect's certificate, for another sum of £1000 in account of his contract for the New Hospital, after some

### **17th April 1851, The North Devon Journal**

Microscopic Writing.— Among the articles to be exhibited at the Crystal Palace is an extraordinary specimen of microscopic writing. Upon a space not exceeding that of a small pin's head, and which, indeed, is almost invisible to the naked eye, are written the following words:—

“Written as a microscopic object for Mr. Dent, 1851, Fromont á Paris.”

The inscription occupies six lines, five of which are written in a bold text hand; the fine and heavy strokes are clearly distinguishable, and are as even and perfect as copperplate writing; the sixth line is capital italics, printed and shaded, and which appear, when seen through the small microscope attached to it, of rather more than an inch in length.

conversation It was Resolved that the consideration of Mr Storrs's application be deferred until the next meeting and that the clerk be instructed to request him in the meantime to fix a date when he will without fail complete the contract and give the Guardians possession of the Building.

### **12th March 1868**

A letter was received from Mr Storrs promising to have the New Hospital completed by the end of next month, and It was Resolved that a cheque for £1000 be signed payable to him on account of his contract.

### **2nd April 1868**

A letter was received from the Poor Law Board sanctioning the appointment of the 3 newly elected Hospital Nurses, and, with reference to Frances Robinson the Workhouse Committee reported that it had come to their knowledge that she had obtained the appointment by falsely representing herself as an unmarried female, and, on that account and for other reasons, they would recommend that she be required to relinquish the office, – It was therefore Resolved that the Clerk be directed to inform her that if she will tender her resignation by Thursday next it will spare the Board the unpleasant duty of dismissing her from the situation.

The chairman also explained that the Hospital Building Committee last Thursday week in order not to delay the completion of the building and without the direct sanction of the Board, ordered the Clerk of the Works to get a number of fire grates made according to a pattern which had been approved....

### **30th July 1868**

Mr Daley [the Master] submitted to the Board a list showing the quantity of Beds, Bedding and other articles required for partially furnishing the New Hospital.

### **3rd September 1868**

Resolved that the Hospital Building Committee be empowered to effect a Settlement with Mr Storrs the Contractor respecting the several matters referred to in the minutes of their proceedings on the 20th and also to sign cheques in payment of the balances due to both the contractor and the architect should the Committee deem it desirable so as to close the Hospital Building Account.

### **10th September 1868**

Resolved that the minutes of the Hospital Building Committee be confirmed and that the best thanks of the Board be accorded to the members of the Committee for their valuable services during the erection of the new Hospital. Mr Ogden gave notice that at the next meeting he would move the appointment of another female nurse in place of Frances Robinson who some time ago resigned, at a salary of £16 per annum with rations.



Original Ashton Workhouse located on Market Street (then Dungeon Street). Known as the Union Workhouse, originally the 'Parish Workhouse.'  
Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

Resolved that Mrs Sarah Lane of Stalybridge widow aged 42 is hereby appointed Hospital Nurse at a salary of £16 per annum with the usual board and lodging.

The Board then proceeded to the election of Hospital Nurses (a married couple) as advertised.

There were only three appointments and It was Moved that William Reynolds aged 25 years and his wife Mary Ann aged 27 years of Bradford near Manchester.... be hereby appointed Nurses at the Workhouse Hospital in the room of Mr and Mrs Naish at a joint salary of £34 per annum being (£20 for the male and £14 for the female) with the usual board and lodgings.

#### **12th November 1868**

Mr Daley called the attention of the Board to the necessity for the continuation of the Gas Mains to the New Hospital and It was Resolved that the Workhouse Committee be required to attend to the matter forthwith.

#### **17th December 1868**

Another letter was received assenting to the appointment of William and Mary Ann Reynolds as Nurses at the Workhouse Hospital.

#### **14th January 1869**

In consequence of there being only one applicant for the situation of Hospital Nurse It was Agreed to repeat the advertisement another fortnight – the appointment to take place on the 28th Instant.

#### **28th January 1869**

Resolved that the Workhouse Committee be empowered to make arrangements as early as practicable for the New Hospital being supplied with water by Ashton Corporation.

#### **28th January 1869**

The Board then proceeded to the appointment of Hospital Nurse....

There were 6 candidates and It was unanimously Resolved that Mrs Sarah Ann Hadfield ... is hereby appointed Hospital Nurse at a Salary of £16 per annum with

the usual Board and Lodging, subject to a satisfactory testimonial....

#### **11th February 1869**

A Form of Authority was submitted to the Ashton Corporation to provide and lay 60 yards of 1 inch piping and a half inch meter for supplying the New Hospital with water and it was Resolved that the Chairman be authorised to sign the form on behalf of the Board.

#### **11th February 1869**

A letter was read from the Poor Law Board sanctioning the appointment of George and Catherine Harwood as Nurse at our Workhouse Hospital.

#### **15th July 1869**

Mr and Mrs Reynolds, Hospital Nurses tendered their resignation, and It was Agreed that it be accepted and that the Clerk be instructed to advertise for another married couple between the ages of 25 and 40 who have had some experience in similar duties at a joint salary of £36 per annum being £20 for the male and £16 for the female, the appointment to take place at 10a.m. on Thursday the 29th Instant.

#### **5th August 1869**

The Board then proceeded to the appointment of Nurses for the Hospital. There were 12 married couples made applications for the vacant offices in the New Hospital, 3 of which were severally proposed for election, viz.:

Mr and Mrs Hawood from the Macclesfield Union  
Mr and Mrs Shotton of Stockport  
Mr and Mrs Leech from the Bradford Workhouse

On being submitted to the meeting there was a majority of votes in favour of Mr and Mrs Hawood who were consequently appointed Nurses at the Workhouse Hospital in the room of Mr and Mrs Reynolds at a joint salary of £36 per annum (being £20 for the male and £16 for the female) with the usual rations and apartment.

There were 3 applicants for the situation of Nurse at present held by Miss Sarah Ann Hadfield two of whom were proposed for election viz Mrs Sarah Keating aged 27 years and Mrs Winifred Kinsella aged 38 both of Manchester.

On being submitted to the meeting, Mrs Keating obtained 8 votes and Mrs Kinsella 9 and It was

Resolved that Mrs Winifred Kinsella... is hereby appointed Hospital Nurse at a salary of £16 per annum with the usual Board and Lodging.

Resolved that Miss Sarah Ann Hadfield be transferred from the Hospital to the Workhouse on her own application and that she be appointed General Assistant to the Matron at her present salary of £16 per annum and the usual Board and Lodgings.

**7th February 1863,  
The Bury Times**

The papers are suggesting that the dresses to be worn at the festivities on the occasion of the marriage of the Prince of Wales should be confined to manufactures of Great Britain. This is with a view to revive various trades now greatly depressed, including the staples of Spitalfields, Coventry, Nottingham, &c.

**23rd September 1869**

A letter was read from the Poor Law Board in reference to the appointment of Winifred Kinsella as nurse at our Workhouse Hospital and enclosing a copy of a communication the Board had received from the Guardians of the Poor of Manchester informing them of the cause of her leaving their service in June last. It was Agreed that the letter be referred to the Workhouse Committee for consideration and report.

**14th October 1869**

A letter was received from the Poor Law Board sanctioning the appointment of Winifred Kinsella to the office of Nurse at our Workhouse Hospital.

**25th November 1869**

Letters were received from Winifred Kinsella and Sarah Ann Hadfield resigning their situations as Hospital Nurses and assistant to the Workhouse Matron and It was Resolved that the resignation be accepted and the Clerk be instructed to advertise in the 3 Manchester, the 3 Ashton and the Hyde newspapers of Saturday next for two other suitable unmarried females between 25 and 45 years of age at a Salary of £18 per Annum each, with the usual board and lodging, the appointments to take place on Thursday next.

**2nd December 1869**

Another letter was received from the Poor Law Board respecting the transfer of the Hospital Loans to the Common Fund, requesting the Guardians obtain the written consent of the lender of the money to the proposal and also to forward to the Board a copy of the notice which was sent to each Guardian in the matter.

**16th December 1869**

Mr Daley reported that Catherine Steele from Liverpool had left her situation of Hospital Nurse, stating that she could not reconcile herself to take charge of lunatic patients and had sent a substitute in the person of Martha Barton to discharge the duties for her until a successor has been appointed.

# Life in the Workhouse

The Poor Law Commission was directly responsible for the daily organisation of the workhouse. Amongst their many duties the panel was charged with generating the model timetable. Such a framework, designed for all such institutions to follow, was characterised by monotony and discipline. Every hour of the day was accounted for:

March to September	Time	October to February	Time
Wake Up	5am	Wake Up	7am
Prayers and Breakfast	6-7am	Prayers and Breakfast	7-8am
Work	7am-12pm	Work	8am-12pm
Dinner	12pm	Dinner	12pm
Work	1-6pm	Work	1-6pm
Prayers	6-7pm	Prayers	6-7pm
Supper	7-8pm	Supper	7-8pm
Bed	8pm	Bed	8pm

Meals were generally eaten in silence with a ban on smoking, drinking and gambling. The work was strenuous and included oakum picking,\* stone breaking and digging for men, with cleaning, sewing, cooking allocated for women. To generate extra funds for the workhouse paupers would also make items such as doormats to sell, together with surplus fruit and vegetables from the grounds.

Each workhouse had a long list of punishable offences including obscene language, fighting with another pauper, or attempting to hit a member of staff. Inmates accused of such misdeeds faced isolation for up to 24 hours and an even more restricted diet.

## Vagrants

The term 'vagrant' covered a variety of categories, from so-called tramps who travelled the country and only entered the workhouse on very rare occasions, to those desperately seeking some form of employment. Nineteenth-century Britain commonly viewed vagrants as worthless and idle troublemakers, unworthy of assistance. Individuals were taught that redemption could be obtained through the principle of 'self-help', a philosophy designed to promote a standard of living free from poor law assistance. Vagrants were housed in the casual wards, dormitories consisting of only the most basic accommodation which the majority

of workhouses were very disinclined to improve. These areas, divided into male and female spaces, were kept separate from the rest of the workhouse so that diseases were less likely to spread. Such wards were often to be found near the porter's lodge, an unsurprising development given that the porter was in charge of admission. The casual ward itself consisted of one large room filled with straw-lined cots and rags for bedding. Vary rarely did the vagrants have a bed to themselves. A bucket was placed in the middle of the room for all to use.

In 1864, the Poor Law Commission published regulations for the design of the casual wards, but these were very slow to be adopted. Entry was by ticket, dispensed either by the porter or relieving officer. Vagrants were usually admitted between 4pm (5pm in summer) and 8pm – for one night only. All such applicants were searched, and any personal possessions removed before bathing in water of a very dubious quality. Nightshirts made of an extremely coarse material were issued, whilst clothes were fumigated and collected the next morning. Finally, the vagrant would be given some food, usually 8oz of bread and perhaps some gruel, a regimen to be repeated for breakfast. Every vagrant also had to earn their keep, with up to four hours of work undertaken in the morning. The men were assigned stone breaking or oakum picking, and the women cleaning, before both were released around 11am.





Eventide: A Scene in the Westminster Union, Hubert von Herkomer (1878). Credit: Walker Art Gallery

**30th December 1843, Manchester Times**

Theft by a Pauper – David Lunn, a pauper in the Ashton Workhouse was brought up before J Jowett, J Lord, J Grimshaw and W Wright Esqs, on Wednesday, charged by Mr Ousey, Governor of the workhouse, with having, during last week, absconded from the workhouse, taking with him a new coat, the property of the parish. Mr Ousey said that various inquiries had been made relative to the prisoner, and at length it was ascertained that he had sold the coat to a broker in the town. The police having found out the prisoner's retreat, he was speedily in custody. Mr Ousey stated that he had asked the wife of the broker for some information respecting the coat, but she insolently refused to give any. He therefore applied that the pauper might be remanded till Saturday, that he might have time to bring up the evidence. The prisoner, who had been committed for a like offence before, was remanded accordingly.

**30th July 1846**

The Governor of the Workhouse having represented to this meeting that many vagrants come into the Workhouse late at night and go

away immediately in the morning, which is not only a great annoyance but also of considerable expense to the Union.

It was Resolved that applicants seeking admission to the Night Asylum be sent to the constable and that if he considers they are really destitute and not imposing on the Union, that he give them a ticket of admission directed to the Governor of the Workhouse.

The Governor wishing to be informed what should be done with the pigs at the workhouse, It was Resolved that the workhouse committee be empowered and directed to sell them.

**6th August 1846**

Mr Baker to be empowered to purchase 6 dozen knives and forks for the use of the Workhouse.

It being considered very desirable that the linen etc. belonging to the Union be marked, It was Resolved that a plate with 'Ashton Under Lyne Union Workhouse' be obtained for the purpose of marking the linen.

The men and boys' clogs be ironed and that Mr Dalgleish the contractor for clogs be paid 3d per pair more than his original contract.

Mr Baker having obtained samples of cloth for men and boys clothing and Mr Bernard being considered the best, the Governor is empowered to get 4 dozen suits for men's and boy's clothing from Mr Bernard.

*There are two clog and pattern makers listed in the Slaters Trade Directory of Lancashire 1848 named Dalgleish, specifically James of 166 Stamford Street, Ashton-under-Lyne and Robert in Henry Square.*

**13th August 1846**

The Governor having consulted with the medical officer for the Workhouse respecting the greatest number of inmates that ought

to be admitted into the House presented an account copy of which follows:–

An account taken of the number of beds in each sleeping apartment in the Ashton under Lyne Union Workhouse Aug 12th 1846 and the opinion of the medical officer consulted as to the number to be continued in each apartment.

Rooms under men's sick ward can be made to hold conveniently 4 single beds.

Bedsteads placed to accommodate 10 more persons, the number recommended to be allowed to be accommodated.

Sent to the Poor Law Commissioners for their approval.

Description of Apartment	Single Beds	Double Beds	Number of Inmates Allowed to Sleep
Female Sick Ward Room 1	4		6
Confinement Room 2	3		3
Attendance Room 3	2		2
Rooms Above Mangle Room 1		2	4
Room 2		3	6
Over Master's Rooms: Room 1	6-7pm	Prayers	6-7pm
For Females & Their Children		5	10
Room 2	3	2	7
Room 3	6	1	8
Room 4	2	4	10
Room 5	1	3	7
Men's Rooms Centre Yard: Room 1		8	20
Room 2	2	1	6
Room 3	7	1	12
1 Set of Rooms on Right Hand Side of Yard Room 1	1	2	6
Room 2	4		4
Room 3	2	1	4
Room 4	2	1	4
2nd Set of Rooms on Ground Floor: Room 1		2	6
Room 2		3	8
1 Set of Rooms Men's Sick Ward: Room 1	4		4
	3		3
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>141</b>





The Able Men's Dormitory. The Workhouse, Southwell, Nottinghamshire. Credit: Glen Bowman under CC BY 2.0

### **19th November 1846**

The Poor Law Commissioners in pursuance of article 11 of the Workhouse Rules, after considering the report made to them by the Board of Guardians and consulting their assistant commissioner on the subject, hereby fix the number of 145 persons as the largest number which it shall be lawful to admit into or retain in the Workhouse. This number is that which the Guardians, under the most favourable circumstances are not at liberty to exceed in the present state of the Workhouse and it includes the sick wards and all other portions of the House in ordinary use....

### **7th January 1847**

From the Workhouse visiting committee it was found that there were 23 inmates in the house more than the number sanctioned by the Poor Law Commission. It was also recommended that 12 or 15 additional bedsteads be procured.

### **14th January 1847**

The Poor Law Commission have written asking what had been done about employing the able bodied poor.

The reply was that nothing had been done since they wrote asking in August last year, but ... the surveyors of the highways refused to find work and [they] also stated that there are 23 able bodied women and 13 men in the house at the present time and the Guardians would feel obliged if the commission would suggest some mode of employment.

### **17th February 1847**

Letter from the Poor Law Commission regarding work for the able bodied poor.... I am to inform the Board of Guardians in reply that the kind of work in which it may be desirable to employ able bodied paupers depends very much on the local circumstances of the Union. They recommend that the able bodied paupers should be employed at some task work, which may be apportioned to the strength of the different individuals and that an officer should be appointed to superintend the paupers while at work....

### **14th January 1847**

All persons [in the workhouse] accustomed to the use of tobacco of 60 years of age and upwards, be allowed  $\frac{3}{4}$  ounce per week.

**11th August 1860,  
Burnley Advertiser**

Age and infirmity have at length so far prevailed that Mr. Bronte has been compelled to cease from active duty; he preached his last sermon in Howarth Church, on Sunday, the 21st ult.\* We believe that the Rev. Mr. Nicholl, husband of Charlotte Bronte (Currer Bell), will become the incumbent of Howarth.

**4th February 1847**

The report of the Workhouse Visiting Committee was received when it was found that there were 17 in the House more than the number sanctioned by the Poor Law Commission. The report also contained a recommendation that 2 dozen black hats and 2 dozen white ones be procured.

**6th May 1847**

The report from the Workhouse Visiting Commission was received when it was found that there were 47 in the house more than the number sanctioned by the Poor Law Commission and also the following memo:— In consequence of the crowded state of the House and the great increase of fever, the doctor recommends that we should not make the usual visit to the House.

In consequence of the cottages contiguous to the workhouse not being suitable for the use of the Union, It was Resolved that it be intimated to Mr Bunting that it is not the intention of the guardians to take possession of the property and therefore he had better relet the premises as soon as possible with the understanding that in the meantime the Workhouse Committee arrange with him as to the payment to be made for the loss of rent. The following letter was read from Mr Austin:—

*I regret to observe that there is an excess of inmates in Ashton-under-Lyne Workhouse over and above the proper number. I shall be much obliged to you if you will have the goodness to bring the matter under the consideration of the Board*

*of Guardians at their next meeting. It is particularly necessary that the number of inmates limited by the committee should not be exceeded under any circumstances during the continuance of the influx of Irish vagrants many of whom it appears carry about with them infectious fever.*

**20th May 1847**

The clerk informed the meeting that the nurse Mrs Sophia Johnson was dead. Mr William Heginbottom on behalf of the Workhouse Visiting Commission stated that they had not been able to procure a nurse but Mr Baker had offered the services of his niece if the Guardians thought proper.

*Mary Sophia Johnson died at the age of 62.*

**8th December 1847**

The Commission observe from the master's report dated the 2nd inst.,\* that the workhouse is very much crowded, the number of paupers at the time in the House being more than seventy above the number which it is calculated to accommodate.

**5th January 1848**

Letter to the Poor Law Board, Somerset House The Board observe that the Committee state that the ventilation of the various rooms in the workhouse is very unsatisfactory and the Day and Sleeping rooms are not considered to be healthy in consequence. The Board request to be informed whether these matters have had the attention of the Guardians. The Board also request to be informed immediately of the change proposed to be made in the dietary\* of certain of the inmates, in order that they may take into consideration the dietary order issued to the Union. The Board regret to observe the want of arrangements by which the applicants for relief are exposed to the weather, and in some cases to possibly a dangerous pressure of the crowd on Board days and they request to know whether this matter has received the attention of the Guardians.

(COPY.)

POOR LAW COMMISSION OFFICE,  
SOMERSET HOUSE,  
27th October, 1847.

SIR,

I AM directed by the Poor Law Commissioners to state, that they have received a communication from the Lords Commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury, acquainting them that their Lordships had directed Mr. Sargent, the Paymaster of Civil Services, to pay to the Treasurer of each Union the proportion payable in respect of the Grants made by Parliament for the Salaries of the Schoolmasters and Schoolmistresses of Workhouses, for the half year ended the 31st of March, 1847, and of a moiety of the salaries of the Medical Officers of the Unions for the same period.

I am at the same time to transmit to you a copy of the Form to be made use of by you as Treasurer of the *Ashton Union*, in drawing a Bill upon Mr. Sargent for the sum of £112. 3. 3, the amount payable to the Union in respect of the above mentioned Grants.

The Bill when drawn on a proper stamp, and signed by you should be transmitted through some Country Banker, to a Banking House in London, to be presented at the Office of the Paymaster of Civil Services, Treasury Chambers, London, for Acceptance; and when the Bill arrives at maturity (which will be in 13 days after the day on which it is accepted) it will be paid through the London Banking House by the Bank of England.

It should be observed that the Bill must on no account be sent to the Paymaster of Civil Services by the Post, but it must be delivered at his Office one day and called for the next, when it will be returned accepted.

I am to add that the amount of the Bill when paid should be placed to the credit of the Union.

I am,

SIR,

Your obedient Servant,

*J. R. Couthart Esq.*  
The Treasurer of the  
*Ashton Union*

*W. G. Lumley.*  
Assistant Secretary.

THE FORM OF BILL REFERRED TO IN THE ABOVE LETTER.

UNION, in the Count of

(To be drawn upon a proper Stamp.)

Place and Date.

AMOUNT £ \_\_\_\_\_

AT TEN DAYS AFTER SIGHT pay to my Order the Sum of  
being the Amount allowed in respect of Salaries, &c.,  
to Medical Officers, Schoolmasters and Schoolmistresses to the 31st of March, 1847.

Treasurer

of the

Union

To William Sargent, Esq.,  
Paymaster, Civil Services,  
Treasury Chambers,  
London. }

NOTE.—The Bill when drawn on a proper Stamp and Signed by the Treasurer should be transmitted through some Country Banker to a Banking House in London, to be presented at the Office of the Paymaster of Civil Services, Treasury Chambers, London, for acceptance; and when the Bill arrives at maturity (which will be in 13 days after the day on which it is accepted) it will be paid through the London Banking House by the Bank of England.

It should be observed that the Bill must on no account be sent to the Paymaster of Civil Services by the Post; but it must be delivered at his Office one day and called for the next, when it will be returned accepted.



**9th September 1848, Manchester Courier**

Offensive Snoring.— At the Town-hall, on Wednesday, Edward Garside, formerly the deputy constable of Stalybridge, but now an inmate of Ashton workhouse, was brought before the bench, charged with using threatening language to other inmates of the house. Jonathan Taylor said that he slept in the next bed to the defendant who had threatened to get up and throw some water upon him because he snored when asleep. Two other paupers spoke as to the conduct of the defendant, and said no one could live with him, he was always threatening them. The defendant made a long statement, in which he said that he had put the governor right in his books since he went and because he now refused to do his work he was put upon. He had then been eighteen hours without food, and he was seventy one years of age. The reason why he had threatened the complainant was because he had struck him on the breast. The Complainant said if he did, he did it while asleep. The defendant was reprimanded and discharged.

**3rd February 1849, Manchester Courier**

BOARD OF GUARDIANS.— At the meeting held at the workhouse on Thursday.... The inmates at present numbered 169. The condition of the workhouse, as regarded repairs, was described by the committee as being most wretched. The rain came through the roof, and the ventilation was extremely bad. Mr. Miller gave it as his opinion that above £100 per annum was spent in repairs alone.— The Chairman thought that they should try for a new workhouse. From the information he had received from the relieving officers, he found that by doing away with the two present establishments, and having a new workhouse there would be a saving of from £1,500 to £2,000 per year.

**23rd March 1850, Manchester Courier**

Mr. Adshead said that for some time past he had intended to bring forward a motion which he begged now to submit for the consideration of the board, 'that each Relieving Officer furnish to the board, on Thursday next, a list of all persons who have absconded from their families from 20th September 1849 to 20th March 1850, the date of leaving, their age, and the parish to which they belong, together with the amount of relief given to the families so left.... Mr. Adshead thought such a list would open the

**4th May 1839,  
Kendal Advertiser**

The Duke of Wellington—  
A false rumour

A great sensation was created in London on Saturday, by an extensively circulated rumour of the sudden death of his Grace, the Duke of Wellington. The rumour commenced at an early part of the day and, as we have heard interfered greatly with business. It was confidently asserted, and as confidently believed, in highly reputable quarters, that his Grace has gone out in the morning, and in the course of his walk had been seized with an apoplectic fit, which had terminated his existence before medical aid could be procured. On inquiry at Apsley House, we found his Grace had taken an airing in the park between the hours of two and three o'clock, but had returned home in excellent health. His Grace was never better than at present.

eyes of the guardians. It would be proved that a majority did not leave them by poverty, and would be well if some check could be put on such immorality. Mr. Evan Leigh said that as he may not have the opportunity to sit on the board again, he suggests that steps should be taken, when the new workhouse was erected, to find employment for the inmates instead of allowing them to smoke their time away. He thought that nail making, stocking frame knitting, pin making etc. might be carried on to advantage, if the board would appoint some person as governor who had a knowledge of machinery, and who could have a skilful mechanic operative to assist him. Several of the guardians thought the question would give rise to considerable discussion. The chairman said there had been a long correspondence on the subject; many persons thought pauper labour unprofitable. Mr. Ousey said there were 162 inmates in the workhouse at present, and only one able-bodied

male and six females. Mr. Kershaw denied that they smoked time away; they were kept doing something, either washing, cleaning, sewing or mending. It was Resolved to entertain the matter at the next meeting.

### **27th July 1850, Manchester Courier**

Defrauding the Railway Company – At the Petty Assizes on Monday, Mr Jonathan Smith, Master at the Union Workhouse, Ashton under Lyne, was summoned by the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company, on a charge of attempting to defraud them – Daniel Ellis, the collector of tickets at Rochdale Station, stated that when the parliamentary train from Yorkshire arrived at 8.51pm, the defendant gave a false ticket; it was from Rochdale to Todmorden. He followed him and charged him with the fraud.... Smith was taken into custody, and whilst at the Railway Inn in the care of Mr Fletcher, inspector of the Rochdale station, he made his escape. Defendant and others were on a 'spree' at Todmorden, and on their return in the evening they called at Rochdale where the defendant produced the false ticket; he was forward in liquor and very insolent to the company's officers – Mr Higginbottom, for the defence, said that his client was a very respectable man.... The Magistrates had no doubt that it was a fraud, and fined the defendant £1 and costs of £1 19s 3d.

*Jonathan Smith was still the master of the workhouse on the 1851 census and remained in post until 1858. Clearly his criminal record did not affect his employment prospects.*

### **29th April 1855**

The usual weekly meeting of the Guardians was held in the Board room on Thursday last, A.B. Wimpenny in the chair. It appeared that the scarcity of water at the Workhouse was severely felt; in fact, Mr Dean stated, the inmates had not even sufficient to wash their shirts.

Nothing had been done towards providing a surplice for the use of the clergymen when performing religious service at the workhouse. Mr Dean then rose to move the proposition of which he had given notice that they should take into immediate consideration the necessity of providing another Board-room and more convenient offices for the Relief Committee. As the want of additional accommodation could not be denied, and as it could be obtained at a slight expense he did

not think that the ratepayers would object to it being carried out. As the Guardians performed their duties gratuitously, they ought to be made comfortable in this respect.

Another annoyance was their having to go out and come into their room through the same doors as the paupers entered and sometimes this was attended with difficulty, as the passage was blocked up with people.

The ventilation of the room too, was very defective and the draught which played around them when the door opened was the reverse of pleasant. He therefore Moved that additional accommodation be provided.



The Old Men's Ward in the Workhouse. Credit: Wellcome Collection

### **10th January 1856**

Mr Dean stated to the Board that there is about a ton of Oakum at the Workhouse and the committee were empowered to advertise it for sale or talk such other measures for disposing of it as they may think desirable.

**19th January 1856, Ashton Reporter**

Mr Smith the Master of the Workhouse received 33 large Testaments and 8 Bibles from the Ashton Auxiliary to the British and Foreign Bible Society for the use of the inmates.

**11th August 1856, Ashton Reporter**

The workhouse committee having reported that several ministers in the town had expressed their willingness to unite and establish a Sunday Afternoon service at the Workhouse as soon as they obtained the sanction from the Guardians, it was unanimously resolved.

**21st March 1857, Ashton Reporter**

Selling workhouse clothes— At the Borough Court on Wednesday, Samuel Worthington, who had been remanded from Monday, was committed for one month for this offence. The prisoner was an inmate of the workhouse, and having asked permission, he was allowed to go out for the day to look for work; but he did not return until morning. At first he said that he had got drunk and lost his coat, but he afterwards acknowledged he had got drunk and sold it for 1s. The coat was stamped as the property of the union, but the stamp had been cut out.

**8th December 1858, Manchester Courier**

Board of Guardians – The public outcry of the mismanagement of Ashton Union Workhouse ... that has led to the resignation of the Master and Matron, has been warmly taken up by some of the Guardians. At the meeting held by the Board yesterday... the following report was read from the workhouse committee:—

After a protracted interview with the Master, that he remains upon the premises until the following Saturday. On the condition that he tendered the resignation of his own office, and that of his wife as Matron, which he did, and

the temporary services of Mr and Mrs Smith (late master and matron) were secured to undertake the management until the vacancy thus contracted, can be filled up....

The statement showed that the stock in many instances, were much at variance with the stock accounts, and that the books had been very irregularly kept.

**30th April 1859**

It appears that some of the inmates of the workhouse are engaged in the manufacture of door rugs and on the suggestion of the chairman, Mr Sandiford promised to enquire into the marketable value of such goods, in order to dispose of several scores already made, which he characterised as very nice and durable things.

**14th May 1859, Ashton Reporter**

Mr Dean reported that a woman of loose character named Sarah Harrison, who had left the workhouse during the last week without instructions ... the committee thought it would be best to take out a warrant against her as an example to others. Mr Mellor thought some punishment ought to be inflicted in this case. The woman had been four or five times in the hospital and on leaving the place resorted to her old dissolute ways and habits. The only course would be to punish her for leaving with the workhouse clothing.

**18th February 1860, Ashton Reporter**

There is still an increase in the number of married women admitted with children, owing to their desertion by their husbands.

The exercise grounds adjacent to the hospital continue to be kept in good order.

**ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE UNION.—The**  
Guardians have on hand a Quantity of Excellently-made COCOA NUT FIBRE DOOR MATS for SALE. The Stock may be inspected, and the prices known, on application to Mr J. W. RATTRAY, Union Workhouse, Ashton. Mats made by Order at the Workhouse.—By order, BENJN. SEYMOUR, Clerk.  
Union Office, Ashton, 22nd June, 1860.

Advertisement in the Ashton Reporter (23rd June 1860) offering for sale door mats made by inmates of the workhouse.  
Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives



An application has recently been made by the Rev. Mr. Poxon, to permit lady visitors to inspect the house; this application has been cheerfully granted by your committee.

The able-bodied paupers under the superintendence of Mr. Fallone, the porter, continue to be kept employed upon mat-making this being a more profitable employment than oakum-picking.

A large tank calculated to impound sufficient water to serve for more than two months consumption has also been completed, the excavation and most of the work having also been performed by the able-bodied inmates. The well continues to afford an abundant supply... considered satisfactory, and more certain should there again occur another long period of drought.

**7th April 1860, Ashton Reporter**  
**CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND THE POOR.**

To the Editors of the Reporter.

I happened to have been labouring under some mistake in connection with what is called the workhouse or union of this town.... The fact is, every obstacle is put in the way of every priest that wishes to attend to the poor. Ashton workhouse.... lies at least a mile and a half distant from my house. Abuses have existed well known to the public, and I am sorry to inform you that after having seen one or two of the guardians in a lobby, and having been told that the guardians had made up their minds, I had no other course to take but that of appealing to the press, and as a last step to demand an investigation.... on my arrival here, some two years ago, I was told by the guardians that a new broom swept clean; and after seeing that a new broom left a great deal of dirt behind it for Mr. Rattray (master) to sweep away, I hope Mr. Rattray will leave no dirt behind him. I beg to say, for the gratification of the guardians and ratepayers, that I have advised my people to die in the streets rather than sell their souls to men who have none.

**26th July 1860, Ashton Reporter**

Mr. Mellor drew the attention of the Board to a girl of the name of Winifred Connelly, 19 years of age who had given them a deal of trouble. It appears she has been in the habit

of discharging herself from the workhouse in the morning, and going to the Relieving Officer after dinner to get an order for readmission to the workhouse at night. He thought this was out of all character, and ought to be put a stop to. People also went up to the workhouse in a state of drunkenness, and demanded admission but he (Mr. Mellor), could not believe that a person who could afford to get drunk was destitute, and therefore he would refuse them admittance. Mr. Sandiford said the girl was born in America and brought up in Ireland.

Mr. Mellor said that some time previously she had broken the windows of Mr. Pearce's office because he had refused to give her an order for the workhouse and from her bearing it appeared evident she was quite a termagant. Her conduct was anything but creditable, and the committee had threatened to punish her on account of her disobedience. Mr. Dean remarked that she wanted to be passed to Ireland. Mr. Mellor observed that, singular as it might appear, she belonged to Salford, but instead of applying there she came to Ashton. The character of the Ashton workhouse obtained from the pauper community was first-rate, and its workings were so good that it might be termed a second 'Agapemone'\* [abode of love]. They would be inundated before long with that class of people, because they found better treatment and a deal more philanthropy in Ashton than anywhere else (laughter). Mr. Mellor thought that if persons discharged themselves, they ought not to have readmission to such characters as those. After one or two other remarks, the matter was referred to the workhouse committee.

**16th August 1862, Ashton Reporter**

Holiday for Oakum Pickers during the Wakes A letter was read from oakum pickers asking for holiday all of next week, alleging as a reason that many of them were desirous of visiting such of their fortunate relatives and friends as were able to keep them. The request was urgently made, and if conceded would be looked upon as another of the many acts of kindness received by them at the hands of the Guardians. Mr Sutcliffe moved that the motion be granted, Mr Duckworth seconded the motion and it was unanimously agreed. Of course, arrangements were made so that the recipients would receive their usual pay without doing the work.

**19th January 1856,  
Manchester Courier**

The War [Crimean] – On Thursday, some excitement was created in Ashton, owing to a very general rumour that Russia had consented to terms of peace.

The Militia in Ashton – Very great and serious complaints are made by the Publicans and others of this town, owing to the proceedings of the militia billeted upon them. The filth which they bring with them is beyond description.

**21st February 1863, Ashton Reporter**

Complaint against the Superintendent of Oakum Pickers – receiving relief for others. Mr Mellor enquired if Wood, the superintendent of oakum pickers, was under the control of the Workhouse Committee. The Chairman replied that he was, or else under the direction of the master. Mr Mellor said that whilst sitting at a relief board it had come to his knowledge, and also to that of the committee, that Wood had been in the habit of granting indulgences to the oakum pickers in consideration of being treated in return to pots of porter.\* In addition to this, they had raised a subscription and presented him with a handsome testimonial, consisting of a silver watch as a token of the respect in which he was held and the high regard they entertained for his moral worth. The Chairman: Shall we first ask if this is so? Mr Mellor said he was perfectly correct in his statement, and if necessary he could give the name of his informant and the whole particulars of time and place.... If this thing was allowed to go on there was no telling where it would end. Mr Sutcliffe said he thought it would have been better if the subject had been named privately to the Workhouse Committee, and if they found that the superintendent of oakum pickers had neglected his duty, he had no doubt they would discharge him immediately. The chairman said that the complaint... might be left in the hands of the workhouse committee.

**7th March 1863, Manchester Courier**

A Refractory Pauper – At the Ashton Borough court, on Wednesday, William Dobbin, from Droylsden but is chargeable to Dublin, was accused of having broken nine windows at Wright's mill, Ashton used for the purposes of the Ashton board of guardians. The prisoner said 'I am guilty' but justified what he had done as his wife would not go with him into the workhouse. He was committed to prison for one month with hard labour. The prisoner said he would have to do it again, and wished the bench to extend the punishment to six months.

**4th May 1863**

Mr Sandiford called the attention of the Guardians to the failure in the supply of water at the workhouse and the consequent inconvenience that is experienced. It was Resolved that the Workhouse Committee be authorised to meet with the Water Works Company for a supply of water.

**11th June 1863, Manchester Courier**

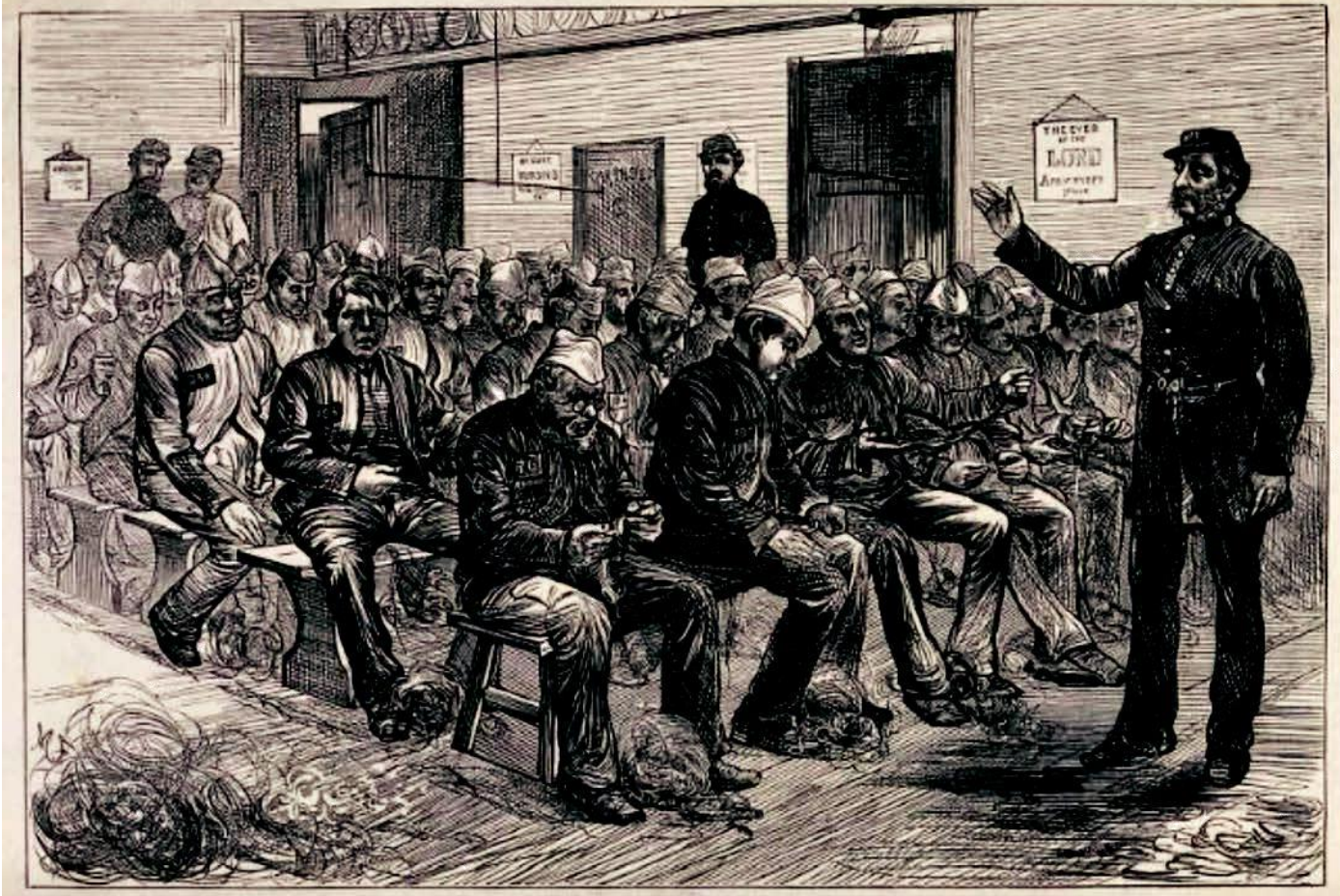
Ashton Borough Court – Catherine McManaron was charged with obtaining relief from the guardians under false pretences, having represented her son was only receiving 1s 6d per week at school, whilst he was working at Messrs. Rayners Mill, Ashton and earning 11s a week when working full time. Committed to 14 days, with hard labour.

**11th July 1863, Ashton Reporter**

MONDAY –

Before W.Heginbottom and J.Dean, Esqs  
A Queer Pauper – James Braithwaite was charged with refusing to do the work set him by the governor of the Ashton-under-Lyne Workhouse – Peter Daley, governor of the Ashton Workhouse, said the prisoner was an inmate of the house, and on Saturday afternoon last he refused to assist in drawing some coals along with other inmates. He said he did not go there to work, as he was a Christian and not a horse. He was willing, he said, to do anything about the place, but he would not act as a horse - Mr Heginbottom told the defendant it was not his duty to choose what labour he was to do, and committed him to prison for 14 days with hard labour.





Middlesex House of Correction: prisoners sitting on long benches untangling bundles of twine, "picking oakum"; a guard raises his hand. Wood engraving. after M. Fitzgerald, 1874. Credit: Wellcome Collection

**25th July 1863**

Mr Moss said he had a matter to bring under the notice of the board, which he thought could not be too widely known. A man who represented himself to be an official from the office of the Board of Guardians, had been going round to the tenants of various properties, asking them who lived there, what rent they paid and who the property belonged to. He took two books out of his pocket and pretended to put down the information he got, and of course many people would tell him they could not pay their rent.

After receiving all the information he could, he said "I've come to tell you that if you pay any rent you will not get relief from the Board of Guardians; they won't grant relief to anyone who pays rent." If this system went on it would preclude property owners from striving to pay their rates, and it would have a bad effect upon tenants who wished to pay a little rent. It was a piece of gross imposition....

The subject then dropped, the board being unanimously of the opinion that if the man could be found out he should be prosecuted.

**28th August 1864**

An application was received from the Oakum pickers for the Guardians to allow 3 of their number a few days leave of absence to solicit subscriptions towards a tea party for the men and their families and It was Agreed that the 3 men named be allowed 1 week for that purpose.

**24th November 1864**

Mr Rowbotham reported Hannah Hall, a single woman with one child for imposing upon the Guardians by continuing to receive her relief for several weeks after having obtained employment. It was Resolved that the Relief Officer be instructed to take out a warrant in the case.

## **2nd March 1865**

The Workhouse Master reported that Mr Wilde of Oldham gave an entertainment at the workhouse on Tuesday evening consisting of his Panoramic Exhibition and singing, which was apparently very highly appreciated by the inmates.

Moved by the Chairman, Seconded by Mr Garside and unanimously Resolved that the thanks of the Board be tendered to the several parties referred to for their seasonable presents.

Resolved that the thanks of the Board be also given to the proprietor of the Ashton Reporter and the Ashton Herald for sending one of their newspapers each week gratuitously for the use of the workhouse inmates.

### **9th June 1860, Illustrated London News**

The total number of registered electors in Great Britain, according to a return just issued is 1,071,975 of whom 570,461 belong to counties and 501,514 to cities and boroughs.

## **15th February 1866**

The case of Harriet Rothwell was then fully considered by the General Board and It was Moved by Mr Duckworth and Seconded by Mr Cooke that she be allowed 4s for one week and an amendment was Moved by the Chairman and Seconded by Mr Slater that an order be made for 5s a week for four weeks and that she be urged to exert herself to get more work of some description to increase her own earnings.

*The 1871 census lists Harriet Rothwell as head of a family residing on Curzon Road, Ashton-under-Lyne, with one married daughter, a weaver, and her son-in-law. She was working as a cotton winder.*

## **1st March 1866**

Mr Daley reported that the Ladies Committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society had made a grant of ten Bibles and sixteen testaments with the bindings only a little soiled for the use of the Workhouse inmates

and It was Moved by the Chairman, Seconded by Mr Slater and unanimously Resolved that the thanks of the Board be given to the Committee for their present.

*Founded by Welsh religious pioneer Thomas Charles in 1804, The British and Foreign Bible Society is a non-denominational Christian network which works to translate, revise, print, and distribute affordable Bibles in England and Wales.*

## **7th April 1866, Ashton Reporter**

Drunkness – Jane McInley was charged with being drunk and riotous in the workhouse – Mr. Daley, the governor of the union workhouse, stated that on Monday last, being a general holiday, he allowed the prisoner, in company with a number of other female inmates, leave of absence. She returned to the house at night in a state of beastly drunkenness, and was put in a separate ward along with another drunken woman. Whilst in the ward she commenced kicking the door, and made use of some very bad language. The prisoner was a mill-hand and able-bodied. She was fined 5s. plus costs, or seven days' imprisonment.

## **25th August 1866, Ashton Reporter**

An unthankful pauper – James Fielding, an elderly roguish looking man, was charged with having absconded from Ashton Workhouse on 10th April 1865 with a suit of workhouse clothing, namely a jacket, waistcoat, pair of trousers, shirt, and a pair of clogs to the value of 7s. Mr. Daley, Governor of the workhouse, said that on the 10th April 1855, he allowed the prisoner – who had then been an inmate for about two months – leave of absence for a day, with the workhouse clothes on. Prisoner had never returned to the house from that date until Thursday last, when he returned to the house as a tramp, for a night's lodging. He was then identified, and given into custody on the charge, which he admitted. Prisoner has been convicted of a similar offence, about twelve months prior to that now complained. The prisoner was committed to two months with hard labour.

## **4th October 1866**

A circular letter was read from the Poor Law Board suggesting that a printed notice should be hung up in each ward of the Workhouse to



the effect that any inmate who has a complaint to prefer should either address it in writing to the clerk or verbally to some member of the visiting committee.

It was felt that the proposed notice would rather have the effect of causing dissatisfaction and give rise to groundless complaints.

### **1st November 1866**

The Workhouse Master reported that the Committee of the Society for Distributing Scripture Truths, Sussex had gratuitously sent for the use of the inmates a parcel carriage free, containing a number of copies of their publications.

### **3rd January 1867**

The Workhouse Master reported that during the past week Mrs Ogden of Stamford Street had presented the children with 120 oranges and 12lbs of nuts, Mrs J D Smith of Chamber Hills with 16lbs of Ormskirk Gingerbread and Mrs William Morley of Victoria Street, Ashton with 500 buns and that those gifts and other little things that had been furnished by two other parties had enabled him to provide a tea party for all in the House on New Year's Day.

### **14th February 1867**

The Guardians did certainly find surplus labour for the repair of occupation roads in several parts of the Union but, in the most notable instances, the one at Hartshead, Lord Stamford provided the material and working tools and also paid for the superintendence of the men.

### **21st February 1867**

The Workhouse Master [Mr Daley] reported that on Monday night last a strong, able bodied young man was lodged in the vagrant ward. On the following morning he tore up every particle of clothing he had, his shoes also he cut into pieces. In consequence of having so many of these cases commonly called 'Tear Ups' the master had a jacket and trousers made of coarse canvas well stamped with the union Mart and then gave them to the man in the place of those he destroyed. It was Resolved that Mr Daley be instructed to take the next similar case before the magistrates.

### **31st August 1867, Ashton Reporter**

The Workhouse Master reported that he had posted up a notice in the vagrant sleeping ward of the Workhouse to the effect that any tramp who tore up his clothing would be supplied with a suit of coarse clothes, branded with the words – "This is a tramp. Ashton-under-Lyne Workhouse."

The Rev. C H Lomax thought it would be advisable for the notice to be read out to the tramps, as some of them could not read – Mr Booth thought the notice should be read out when the tramps were breakfasting – The Chairman: The mischief is done then – Mr Hemingway: The greater the secrecy we could observe as to what would be the punishment the better. We gave a suit of sack clothes to one man and he was encouraged by the public, who gave him alms on the Market Ground-the Chairman: It costs us 15s to take a tramp before the magistrates, and we shall save money by adopting this course – Mr Hemingway: If some of the tramps saw a notice of that description they would dare each other to tear their clothes up, and we should have more cases than we have at present. Mr Booth: The vagrant who exhibited himself in the Market Ground, did so not as a tramp, but as an inmate of the workhouse, and thereby obtained alms....

Some of the members thought it would be better not to inform the tramps of what would be done with them for tearing up their clothes and a division took place on the question, when 13 voted for the above named notice being posted in the casual ward and four or five against it.

### **24th October 1867**

The clerk reported that on last Tuesday a number of the vagrants had destroyed a quantity of the old rope weighed out to them to pick into oakum and that on Saturday Mr Daley took four of them before the Borough Magistrates when the men pleaded guilty and were each sentenced to 1 month's imprisonment with hard labour.

It was Resolved that a notice be posted in the Tramps Ward calling attention to the offence and the punishment and intimating that all such offenses in the future will be similarly dealt with.



New Casual Poor Ward. Illustrated London News (28th September 1867). Credit: Manchester Archives+

**7th November 1867**

Ordered that the master of the Workhouse of this Union do set every adult person not suffering any temporary or permanent infirmity of body, being an occasional poor person who shall be relieved in the said Workhouse, in return for food and lodgings afforded to such person, to perform the following Task of Work, that is to say:

- Males to pick 1lb of Oakum
- Females to pick ½lb of Oakum

**2nd January 1868**

Mr Daley reported that since the last meeting the following additional presents had been received for the Workhouse inmates:

- Mr Allen Belfield: 120 oranges
- Mr Henry Johnson of Ashton: 100 oranges
- Mr William Morley, Baker: 500 currant buns

**1st January 1867,  
Sheffield Independent**

The Fire at the Crystal Palace –  
The fire was not quite extinguished yesterday morning, but all danger had passed away. Speculations continue to be indulged as to the amount of damage, and we are told that some of the surveyors of the different fire offices estimate it at nearly half a million.

These articles together with others previously forwarded had enabled them to get up a Christmas party on New Year's Day, on which occasion they were favoured with the gratuitous services of four gentlemen who executed several choice pieces of instrumental music.

### **30th April 1868**

Resolved that the Board undertake the cost of maintenance and clothing for Edward Lee of Clayton aged 26 years at Henshaw's Blind Asylum Manchester to afford him an opportunity of learning a trade, Mr Calvert having offered to contribute through the Board 2/6d per week on account of such cost for 12 months.

### **23rd July 1868**

The Workhouse Master reported that Mr John Jackson of Manchester had forwarded a large parcel of books and periodicals for the use of the Workhouse Inmates.

### **3rd December 1868**

Resolved that the Finance Committee be authorised to pay an account of 11/6d for glazing incurred by Mr Pierce in consequence of damage to his windows maliciously committed by a pauper named Caroline Smith.... and for which she was sent to prison for one month by the Ashton Borough Justices.

### **24th December 1868**

Mr Daley reported that Mr Coates Grocer Ashton, Mr James Brown Greengrocer and Mrs George Booth of Mossley, had forwarded to the workhouse inmates their usual Christmas presents consisting of Figs, Nuts, Oranges and other fruits and a well-laden Christmas tree for the Children.

### **21st January 1869**

The Workhouse Master reported that Mrs Leebridge has presented the Inmates with a series of the 'Leisure Hour' and 'Sunday at Home' publications and It was Resolved that the thanks of the Board be accorded to her for her gift.

The question of the consumption of wine, spirit and porter at the Workhouse was again the subject of comment and It was Resolved that Mr Daley be instructed to forward the Medical Book to the next meeting of the Board for inspection by any of the Guardians.

### **20th February 1869, Ashton Reporter**

Great Increase of Vagrancy.— During the last week an extraordinary number of vagrants have passed through the tramp ward of the Ashton Workhouse. For some time past the weekly average has been about 140, but last week over 170 casuals were given a night's shelter in the house. Surely this 'profession' requires the attention of legislature.

### **13th May 1869**

It was Resolved that the thanks of the Board be accorded to Messrs J Fernihough and Son for their present of illustrated periodicals for the Workhouse Inmates as reported in the Master's Journal.

### **17th June 1869**

Resolved that the thanks of the Board be accorded to Messrs Taylor of Denton for their present of hats for the workhouse inmates and also to Mr Joshua Wood for his gift of religious periodicals for distribution through the House....

### **11th November 1869**

It was Resolved that the thanks of the Board be given to Mr Kenyon of Ashton for the present of periodicals to the Workhouse. Moved by the Chairman, Seconded by Mr Booth and It was also Resolved that the Workhouse Committee be empowered to appoint a Clerk to the Workhouse Master at a salary of about 12s per week.

### **18th November 1869**

Resolved that the time to be worked at the Workhouse to be from 8.30a.m. – 4.30p.m. with the usual rest at noon for the next three months.

### **25th November 1869**

It was Resolved that the thanks of the Board be accorded to Mr Kenyon of the Market Place, Ashton for his second present of books for the Workhouse.

*William Kenyon is described as a bookseller, stationer and newsagent in the Market Hall of Ashton-under-Lyne in the 1874 Morris and Co. Trade Directory.*



# Parish Farm

In the 1840s, Poor Law Unions explored the idea of providing work on parish farms to able-bodied paupers claiming relief. Not everyone, however, was in favour of the scheme, as it followed that money would have to be drawn from the poor rates for the purpose of renting land and hiring stock. An experienced manager was also a necessity and funding would have to be found to ensure proper oversight of the farm and the pauper labourers, usually men with little experience of agricultural work. Guardians were especially conscious that this expenditure had to be justified to ratepayers. There was also a limit as to how much land could be rented as neighbouring farmers often objected to the possibility of reduced profits, fearing that their own enterprises would be priced out the market. The supposedly over-generous payment offered to such workers also came under considerable criticism as a 'premium for paupers.'

Despite these reservations, many Boards of Guardians chose to invest in and administer a parish farm, operating a number of trial schemes which frequently proved to be short-lived. There is evidence that the Ashton Union was one such body, designating a 'test' area of Ashton Moss to be adapted for this agricultural endeavour. However, there were problems from the start with paupers not wishing to work there. The Board of Guardians paid a pittance in wages, conscious of their responsibility to the ratepayers who demanded value for money, and firm in their belief that the able-bodied should provide their own labour.

The parish farm experiment instituted by the Ashton Union ran only for a very brief period. Indeed, there is no evidence attesting to pauper labour of this nature after 1850.

## **17th June 1848, Manchester Guardian**

It was suggested that the workhouse committee should take the management of the land recently taken, until a committee could draw up a report of the land to be pursued – Mr Mellor, as a member of the committee had no objections to serve until the committee could report – Mr Stanley then said that on Thursday last they gave twenty orders for men to go upon the land the following day, some of who were to work one, two or three



1862 map showing Moss Cottage, the area where Moss Farm was located. Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

days each. On Friday morning they assembled and asked Mr Ellis what they were to receive as enumeration, he told them he had no order concerning the payment that would be made. The whole of them refused to go to work. Mr Stanley then directed Mr Ellis to apply to the Governor, Mr Smith, to allow as many of the people in the house to go as he could spare. He obtained eleven in number who went upon the ground after dinner on Friday.

In the course of the past week however twenty-one of those who received the order to work had reconsidered their conduct and returned to work leaving only eight who wouldn't. It was resolved that Messrs Harrison, Peacock and Dearnaley together with members of the workhouse committee and officers of the Board form a committee to draw up a plan to be proceeded with in respect of managing the land.

## **24th June 1848**

A report of the committee appointed by the Guardians to consider the best means of giving employment to able bodied applicants for Parochial Relief. Those appointed were – Thomas Mellor, Joseph R Stevens, Frederick Bromley, John Ousey and John Stanley. It was Resolved ... to recommend and urge upon



**19th January 1844, *The Hull Packet and East-Riding Times***

**CONSUMPTION OF BREAD AND FLOUR IN THE METROPOLIS.—**

It is estimated that 30,000 sacks of flour are consumed weekly in the metropolitan districts, the population of which, according to the last census, is 1, 870,727; the consumption of bread, allowing 5lb. weekly to each person, is 2, 338, 409 loaves, each weighing 4lb.; and admitting that a sack of flour is manufactured into 93 of these loaves, it requires 25,144 sacks to yield a sufficient quantity of bread for the metropolis, leaving 4,856 sacks for puddings, biscuits, pastry, and other manufactures.

the attention of the Board, the cultivation of waste and other lands as near the centre of the Union as can be obtained with the view of ultimately locating as many able-bodied poor as possible upon the same, in order that instead of continuing a useless burden upon their respective parishes they may again become independent, content and happy members of society.

The committee have had an interview with the agent of the Earl of Stamford, Lord of the Manor.... they have had a conditional understanding with George Goodwin that the Board may have immediate possession of seven acres of the Moss Farm, with liberty to take twenty-three statute acres in addition after harvest, the seven statute acres, if no more be taken, at a rental of £3 an acre, but if the remainder be taken, then the whole thirty acres for £2 5 shillings an acre. These may be given up at any time or may be held by the Board for the same term as Mr Goodwin holds the remainder of the farm.

The committee are of opinion that the above seven-acre plot would find suitable employment for many who are now and who are likely to be chargeable to the Union.

**28th June 1848, *Manchester Courier***

Mr. B.S. Trainor rose and moved an amendment.... The customary profits of tradesmen were entirely gone. Capital was fast eaten up, and such a wretched state of poverty were we in, that our guardian, Mr. Wimpenny, could not afford to give more than five-pence a day for an able-bodied man and his wife working on the parish farm.

**1st July 1848, *Manchester Guardian***

John France who had been sent to work on the farm, as being idle and negligent. He was afterwards sent to sweep the streets. The inspector had sent him back with a similar character, and would not have him any longer. The man complained of having a disorder that prevented him doing a proper quantity of work; but he had been examined by Mr Wood, the surgeon, who pronounced him in good health. The man was sent back to the farm.

Mr Wimpenny, the chairman once again raised the issue of the farm only being a 'test' to try those men whom the Board believed were idle and would not seek employment. 'He would never think of sending a man on the land who was known to be of an industrious character, or who had been thrown out of work by an accident. The land could not be used for profit; they must not be farmers and entertain the idea of employing the whole of the able-bodied paupers upon small pieces of land.'

Mr Mellor then moved that the paupers sent to work on the land receive 1 shilling per day. Mr Stanley remarked that at least a dozen men who had been sent to work on the land at 1 shilling per day had not gone to work and he wished the committee to come to some understanding with respect to these men before a motion was carried. It was remarked by Mr Mellor that they would have to perform the work before they received the money, which was contrary to what had been done before. They proceeded to pay them every night.

**15th July 1848, *Manchester Courier***

**BOARD OF GUARDIANS.—** The weekly meeting of this body was held at the Workhouse on Thursday.... On the motion of Mr. Thomas W.

**Moss Farm, Ashton-under-Lyne.—To Gentlemen, Farmers, Graziers, Butchers, and Others.—Important Sale of Live Stock, Implements of Husbandry, and other Effects. By order of the proprietor, who is changing his residence.  
By Mr. OUSEY, on Tuesday the 6th day of June, 1848, on the premises at the Moss Farm, near the New Church, on the Manchester Road, Ashton, in the occupation of Mr. Charles James Andrew:**

Extract from an advertisement offering Moss Farm for sale, Manchester Guardian (27th May 1848). Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

Mellor, an ex-officio guardian, it was resolved that parties sent to the parish farm be not paid until they have done the work allotted to them. Mr. Dearnaley said he understood that twenty and a half days' work had been paid for which had not been done.

**22nd July 1848, Manchester Courier**

**BOARD OF GUARDIANS.**—The weekly meeting of the board was held on Thursday, at the workhouse. The report of the workhouse committee was read.... The report alluded to the state of the parish farm; of ninety days, fifty had not been worked up; this would be a saving in wages to the amount of £2 10s.

**2nd August 1848, Manchester Courier**

**MEETING AT MOSSLEY.**—On Monday, being Mossley Wakes, the spinners of Mossley formally opened their six acre plot ... for the purpose of employing those of their body who may be thrown out of employment, and who would thus have to rely upon society's funds for support. In accordance with the request from the spinners' committee, the Rev. J.R. Stephens attended ... to deliver an address.

He gave his views upon the parish farm, as he originally intended it should have been carried out, but it was now made into a test, some of the cotton masters having said that if they gave one shilling a day to the men employed on the land it would empty the mills.

**23rd September 1848**

The Board have had the report under their consideration and direct use to state that as regards the proposal that the Guardians should take waste land or other land for the purpose of employing able bodied paupers in its cultivation.

The Board do not object to such a measure, provided the labour of the paupers is

**9th March 1867,  
The South London Press**

The Leeds Corporation have adopted a steam stone-breaking machine which performs its work very well, and reduces the cost from 15d. per ton to 3d. or 4d.

The machine breaks 100 tons of limestone per day. Labour is also saved in the carting of the stone, for it is discharged wholesale from the hopper of the machine and fills a cart in six minutes.

subjected to such efficient superintendence, as will insure its operating as a check upon improper applicants for relief.

But as far as this part of the proposal is concerned the Board are desirous of being made acquainted with the details of the arrangements before they give their approval.

It was Moved by Mr Mellor and Seconded by Mr Bayley and Resolved unanimously that all labourers on the farm be paid at the rate of 1 shilling per day and if an applicant requires further relief that such cases be left to the discretion of the Relief Board.

**27th September 1848, Manchester Courier**

**MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GUARDIANS.**—The weekly meeting of this board was held at the workhouse on Thursday.... A pauper named Samuel Haigh was stated to have stolen a quantity of potatoes while working on the parish farm; proceedings had been taken against him before the magistrates.

**16th December 1848, Manchester Courier**  
**ELECTION OF COUNCILLOR FOR**  
**PORTLAND PLACE WARD.—**

In consequence of the resignation of Mr. Brierly a vacancy has occurred in the above ward. The Whig party... have determined to leave no effort to secure the return of their candidate, Mr. Stanley the poor law guardian. This gentleman having rendered himself extremely unpopular by proposing fivepence a day as the wages of a married man on the parish farm, and by his recent refusal to give up the dead body of a deceased pauper when claimed by the relatives for interment....

**22nd December 1848**

Letter from the Poor Law Board regarding the proposed hiring of land for the employment for paupers in its cultivation ... and inform you that the Board are willing to sanction the Guardians hiring the piece of land for the above purpose but as it is at a distance of a mile from the Union Hospital, the residence and place where Mr Ellis' superintendence is necessary, the Board think he cannot effectually superintend the paupers while employed on the land and they therefore desire that another person be appointed for the purpose.

**3rd February 1849, Manchester Courier**

**BOARD OF GUARDIANS.—** At the meeting held at the workhouse on Thursday, Mr A.B. Wimpenny occupied the chair.... Mr. Stott asked whether the parish farm was a paying concern or otherwise? He was anxious that the committee should bring forward a statement in relation to the matter.— Mr. Stephens said that he thought any document of such a nature as the one referred to would present a very singular feature. The farm was originally intended to be a place for those desirous of honest employment, instead of which it had been made a penal settlement, and the paupers were sent there as a terror.

**24th February 1849, Manchester Courier**

The Workhouse committee recommended the use of haricot beans as an article of food because they were better than potatoes and half the price. They also recommended the appointment of an inspector for the Parish Farm. The chairman said he was glad that the committee had directed their attention to the latter subject, he was of the

opinion that an inspector had been long wanted and hoped that they would get someone who would work; the paupers sent there did little or nothing.

The Rev J.R. Stephens did not see how they could get them to work under such a system of degradation; the Parish Farm was nothing but a penal settlement and was not what was originally intended. The Chairman replied that it would be illegal to do otherwise than they had done; all other Unions had carried out the same principle of test. Mr Hyde replied that when the farm was first mentioned he understood that it was solely as a means to punish the idle and drive them to get work for themselves instead of coming to seek relief. In reply to the chairman, the clerk said there was an act by which, with the sanction of the poor-law board, they could employ parties on the land.... Mr F.W. Bromley agreed with Mr. Stephens that the original proposition was altogether deviated from.... Mr T.W. Mellor bore witness to the fact that the original intention was frustrated; the only obstacle in the way was, that they could not procure land sufficiently cheap. He understood that the guardians of the Sheffield union only paid at the rate of five shillings an acre for their land. The Chairman said that with regard to the original proposition, he demurred to the report of Mr. Stephens; he must take shame to himself for not giving the matter a thought at the time, but it would be remembered that it was read hastily over by Mr. Stephens when many of them were anxious to leave and the board agreed to it....

The Chairman said he had been frequently laughed at because of the mode in which they conducted the parish farm.

**3rd March 1849, Manchester Courier**

**ASHTON BOARD OF GUARDIANS.—** The weekly meeting of the Ashton board of guardians was held at the workhouse on Thursday.... The minutes of the workhouse committee were read, from which it appeared, that they recommended Mr. Ellis to resume his duties as inspector on the parish farm.

**15th March 1849**

The workhouse committee are authorised to appoint an efficient person to superintend the farm and that Mr Ellis be ordered to resume his duties as Inspector of Nuisances.\*



Ashton Moss, showing the rear of Moss Lodge. Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

**10th April 1849**

Resolved that the Workhouse committee are hereby appointed to take the management of the farm and also to attend to the nuisance department.

**9th June 1849, Manchester Courier**

*BOARD OF GUARDIANS.*— The general business of the board on Thursday did not last many minutes.... It was stated that large numbers who came for relief were ordered to work at the parish farm, and that in many cases they refused to do so: those who did not obey the rules were refused relief, and by this means a great saving was effected weekly.

**16th June 1849, Manchester Courier**

Mr. Kenworthy complained that the parish farm was not half cultivated.

**22nd September 1849**

A letter from the Relieving Officers Joseph Tipping and Samuel McCulloch was sent to the Guardians.... They explain that there are too many able-bodied paupers claiming relief and that ten acres of farm land will not sustain enough work of these people. They also claim that there is not sufficient accommodation in the workhouse for them.

**15th June 1850, Manchester Guardian**

Mr Smith the Governor reported that there were 75 children in the house and the school was consequently overcrowded. The committee therefore recommended that some of the children be sent to weed on the Moss Farm.



# Funding and Finance

The Board of Guardians in each Union were tasked with the collection of the poor rate which funded the workhouse. Information preserved during this process typically included the names, addresses and ages of each householder and the amount paid. These details were listed in the poor rate books. Such financial matters generated a huge amount of administration for which several members of staff were responsible. The clerk of the Union maintained records such as loans made to paupers, applications and report books, relaying fiscal proceedings to national bodies such as the Poor Law Commission. The treasurer managed all payments and transactions, ensuring that accounts were appropriately balanced.

Place of birth played a prominent role in the life of the pauper. Indeed, the principle of settlement ensured that every person had somewhere to which they legally 'belonged,' usually the town or city in which they had been born. An exception to this rule existed for married women who were said to be

associated with their husband's district of birth. Settlement certificates\* were often issued so that a person could move to another parish for work and be eligible for poor relief. If the authorities discovered that an individual was about to become a 'burden' on the Union through ill-health or employment, a settlement examination\* would usually take place with a magistrate and an overseer of the poor. They would investigate whether the person or family in question had a legal right to remain in the Union. If this were not decided in their favour, a removal order\* would subsequently be served. If, however, an individual born in a different area was permitted to receive relief within the Union, the original parish of settlement would be contacted in order to secure financial assistance. In the event that outdoor relief was granted, the applicant, in return for aid, would undertake manual labour such as stone-breaking. Those paupers registered for indoor relief were employed in the workhouse according to their capabilities, but did not receive any financial reward.



Poor Rate Books. Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

The aim of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act had been to offer assistance only through the workhouse. This newfound focus culminated in the dissemination of further regulations designed to heavily curtail the administration of aid outside its walls. In reality, however, such a ban proved difficult to enforce and a compromise was reached. In 1842, the Outdoor Labour Test Order\* was issued by the Poor Law Commission to a selection of Unions. This decree permitted help to able-bodied paupers through the usage of out-relief in cases where this approach was felt to be necessary. Yet the emphasis on outlawing the distribution of such support to unadmitted applicants persisted. In 1844, the Outdoor Relief Prohibitory Order withdrew all outdoor relief from able-bodied men and women, excluding only those in 'exceptional circumstances.' Despite the renewed scope of the legislation, this ruling was again not strictly observed.

In order to manage the logistics of supplying pauper aid, each town within a Union was allocated a district number. Each of these districts was overseen by a relieving officer who would interview claimants in need and distribute out-relief to those for whom help was required on the condition that such assistance was not overly burdensome on his budget. This official could also summon the medical officer if he suspected that an applicant was sick and could not afford to be examined by a doctor.

It is important to realise that the workhouse did not exist in isolation. Indeed, it was part of a much bigger national system of poor relief. As such, during this period there was a growing acceptance that the institution had a purpose quite removed from its original intention, namely that of hospital, orphanage and a place for the elderly.

### **11th June 1846**

At this meeting the following certificates of chargeability\* were duly signed –

Ann Dinnagher to the township of Dukinfield said to belong to Ireland

Maria Pearson 20 years and Nancy her child aged 7 months to Dukinfield, settlement unknown

### **11th November 1848, Woolmer's Exeter and Plymouth Gazette**

SWEET POTATOES.– A small parcel of this esculent has been received from Madeira. The cultivation of sweet potatoes, as well as other kinds from English seed, is being increased to supply this market; and as the voyage is now made from Madeira to Southampton at an average of from 11 to 12 days, they arrive in sound condition.

Oranges and bananas are also being cultivated to a considerable extent for consumption in England, and a parcel of them arrived by the same ship.

Eliza Green 21 years said to belong to Manchester

John Longsdon 30 years, Grace his wife 27 years, Maria 6 years and Charles 2 years to Dukinfield said to belong to Ashton-under-Lyne

Hannah Crowton to Dukinfield supposed to belong to Cunnington in Aylesbury Union.

### **23rd December 1846, Manchester Guardian**

The Manchester Board of Guardians and the Relieving Officer at Ashton – From the report of the proceedings of the Board during the last two weeks, it would appear that the attention of the guardians, and of one of the assistant poor-law commissioners, has been called to a case in which a pauper, named Ellen Clarke, had stated that she applied for relief at Ashton, and that she had been sent to Manchester, the relieving officer or some other person at Ashton having given her sixpence in order to get rid of her. We are assured that no application whatever has been made by any such person to the relieving officer of this district.

### **10th February 1847, Manchester Guardian**

On Thursday last, the weekly meeting of the Ashton Board of Guardians was held in the Boardroom of the Workhouse, Mr Oldham

Whittaker in the chair. Cases relieved in No 1 District during the past week, 602 at a cost of £78 18s 11 ½d; No 2 District 420 cases, cost £51 9s 5d; No 3 District, 165 cases, cost £20 6s 2 ½d. The number of inmates in the workhouse is 162 and the average cost per head 2s 7d.

**8th April 1847**

A cheque for £57 10s be signed for payment for the first half years rent of the Workhouse.

The estimate of the cost of certain alterations required in seven cottages with a view of adding them to the present Poor House according to the description given by Mr Baker including all work and materials except whitewashing will be about £50.

**20th October 1847, Manchester Courier**

*Signs of the Times.*—

During last week some of the cheques signed by the guardians of the Ashton poor-law union presented to the bank here, were dishonoured, they being upwards of £88 in arrears.

**25th September 1852, Manchester Guardian**

The following is the return made by Mr Smith, the Master of the Workhouse, for the week ending on Wednesday:— Admitted 28; born 0; charged 12; dead 1; able-bodied males 0; able-bodied females 6; children under 16 years 78; total sick 84 (in hospital); remaining 241; vagrants lodged 20.

**30th August 1856, Ashton Reporter**

A resolution to the effect that a sum not exceeding £20 should be placed at the disposal of the Workhouse committee to provide a library for the Workhouse was passed unanimously.

**23rd May 1857, Ashton Reporter**

The attention of the Workhouse Committee was drawn to the heavy amount of the Workhouse gas bill for the past quarter. Mr Dean said Mr Smith was very careful not to burn more than was necessary. The inferiority of the illuminating power of the gas was suggested as the real cause of the excessive consumption. The guardians expressed their dissatisfaction at the enormous amount of the bill.

**30th May 1863, Ashton Reporter**

*A New Call*

The clerk said that at the end of the half year ending the 25th of March there was something

like £15,000 in the treasurer's hands; but the balance in the bank at the present time was £4,765, which was only something like three weeks' expenditure. He thought it was not desirable that the union should be run aground, and therefore suggested that a 1s 6d call should be made, or something that would last over four or five weeks, in order to tide over the interim it would take in obtaining the loan. If the money was obtained in the meantime they need not press the overseers, but have it to fall back on. A call of 18d in the pound would realise £8,737. It would have to be made out in proportion to the calls not made up, and it would depend, in great measure, as to how the township had paid up the January call. He would suggest that the call be made payable that day fortnight. Deducting the balances that were to the credit of the different townships, it would leave each township to pay, under the 18d call, as follows:—

Ashton-under-Lyne	£3,404 5s 0d
Denton	£342 15s 0d
Droylesden	£522 0s 0d
Dukinfield	£2,375 15s 0d
Godley	£128 10s 0d
Hattersley	£6 15s 0d
Haughton	£69 10s 0d
Hollingworth	£233 5s 0d
Matley	£99 0s 0d
Mottram	£161 10s 0d
Newton	£966 10s 0d
Staley	£424 15s 0d
Tintwistle	£2 10s 0d
<b>Total</b>	<b>£8,737</b>

The Rev T Radley proposed and Mr Maughan seconded, that an 18d call should be made. The motion was put and carried unanimously.

**18th July 1863, Ashton Reporter**

Some discussion took place respecting the calls on the various townships not being paid up, and it was moved by the chairman, seconded by Mr Hadley, that, unless they were paid within a fortnight, proceedings would be taken for their recovery.

**17th November 1864**

The Droylsden Committee wrote that after a consideration of the state of unemployment in the district, they have decided to suspend the distribution of relief and adjourned to 11th January 1865.

**7th May 1847, The Hull Packet and East Riding Times****STEAM TO ST. PETERSBURG.–**

The splendid steam-ship Rob Roy, Lieut. Knocker, R.N., Commander, sailed on Tuesday morning at 8A.M., on her first voyage this summer to St. Petersburg. She took out thirty-four passengers. Her cargo consisted principally of yarn and manufactured goods, and she had besides seven carriages and three horses. The same vessel is, we understand, intended to sail every month from this port to St. Petersburg, during the summer.

**26th October 1865**

<b>Examples of half year expenditure</b>	<b>Costs</b>
Maintenance	£1219 14s 8d
No Resident Poor Account	£19 4s 0d
Out-relief	£6332 6s 2d
Funerals	£29 14s 10d
Lunatic Asylum Account	£855 1s 9d
Vaccination Fees	£238 8s 0d
Registration Fees	£243 1s 0d
County Rate	£3014 0s 0d
Common Fund	£8554 12s 2d
Building Account	£500 0s 0d
Workhouse Loan Account	£81 7s 10d
Extra Medical Fees	£206 16s 0d
Clothing	£141 4s 3d
Salaries	£921 14s 6d

**17th May 1866**

Alice Gregson and daughter from the workhouse appeared before the Board and Mr Beeley was instructed to ascertain the earnings of her son Thomas before Thursday next and also inform him that he must make some arrangement to assist in maintaining his mother in the workhouse.

**18th Oct 1866**

A letter endorsing a resolution under the Common Seal of the Board was also received from the Guardian of the Altrincham Union consenting to receive Jane Orme and her 4 children without an Order of Removal\* and It was Resolved that Mr Beeley be instructed to remove the family to Knutsford at the earliest opportunity.



**29th November 1866**

Resolved that the Chairman be authorised to sign and affix the common seal to a form of certificate admitting the settlement of Jemima Broadbent aged 20 years at present chargeable to the Huddersfield Union and settled in Dukinfield by birth and without putting the Guardians of that Union to the expense of an Order of Removal.

**25th April 1867**

A letter was received from the Clerk to the Manchester Guardians in reference to the complaint in which Tulley's children were removed from the Manchester Workhouse on the 13th instant – Mr Harrop stated that as the children were sent in the Guardians' own conveyance direct from the Manchester Workhouse to the Workhouse of the Ashton-under-Lyne Union it was not deemed necessary by the overseer who has charge of all such cases in Manchester to purchase any additional clothing for them.

**26th September 1867**

Jervis Lowe appeared before the Board to explain why he had neglected for some time past to pay the sum of 3/6 per week required by the Board towards his father's maintenance at the Asylum – It was Resolved that unless he pay up the arrears due from him within a fortnight the Relieving Officer be directed to apply to the Magistrates for an Order of Maintenance\* in the case.

**13th February 1868**

A Notice of Chargeability and an Order were received from the Overseers of the Poor of the Township of Manchester for the removal\* of James Johnson and wife and 5 children settled in Ashton by apprenticeship and It was Resolved that Mr Pierce be instructed to make the necessary enquiries into the settlement within the time allowed by law.

**29th October 1868**

It was Agreed that Mr Pierce be instructed to take the necessary steps for the removal of Julia Hurley and 4 children to their settlement in Ireland.

**10th December 1868**

A letter was also received from the Clerk to the Atherstone Union admitting the settlement of Harriet Barsby and 3 children and enclosing an Order for the admission of the family into their Workhouse and It was Resolved that Mr Beeley be instructed to see to their removal in due course.

**11th April 1869**

A letter was received from the Clerk to the Halifax Union expressing surprise that this Board has taken out an Order for the removal of Betty Bottomley and children, when their Guardians were willing to repay such amount of relief as this Board might consider necessary to meet the case. It was Resolved that the Clerk be instructed to forward a copy of the letter of the 6th February last from their Assistant Clerk, stating that 'they do not admit the settlement of Betty Bottomley and children to be in the Halifax Union and that though previously relieved on their account their Guardians now believe it was done in error' and at the same time to inform them that having now been put to an expense of £1.18s. 8d in fees to the Magistrate's Clerk in connection with the Order of Removal, they cannot do otherwise under the circumstances than execute the Order unless the Halifax Board will repay the costs unnecessarily incurred.

**22nd May 1849, The  
Cumberland Pacquet & Ware's  
Whitehaven Advertiser**

Porcelain is now used in making brooches combining white, black and gold, in colours of extraordinary beauty.

**15th July 1869**

A letter was received from the Clerk to the Chorlton Union requesting the Board to accept the Settlement of John Mather who had been found wandering in Burnage and removed to Prestwich Asylum.... It was Agreed that the Clerk be instructed to state in reply that the Guardians have no objection to receive Mather into their Workhouse but they declined to consent to his being transferred to this Union whilst at Prestwich without an Order.



# Board of Guardians

The Poor Law Commission oversaw the administration of relief through the Poor Law Unions. These Unions – superintended by a Board of Guardians – were divided into parishes, each of which was represented by one such official. There were two classes of Guardians, namely elected and ex officio. To serve as the former, one had to be a ratepayer, occupying property with a chargeable value of at least twenty pounds. Any previous posts held must not have resulted in dismissal. Elections were usually held at the beginning of April. Ex officio Guardians were entitled to board membership by virtue of their position as magistrates, and their power and duties were the same as those who were voted in by ballot. The service of both types of appointee was unpaid. Guardians could represent more than one parish or township. Once elected, those chosen could serve again in consecutive years.

The size of the Board varied according to the size of the Union – a minimum of three administrators was needed for a business meeting regarding the allocation of relief to the poor. Various sub-committees were formed each year to assist with the organisation of the union. One of the most important of these was the Workhouse Visiting Committee who met each week in the workhouse to check that indoor relief was being managed appropriately, in accordance with the dictates of the Poor Law Commission, whilst also hearing complaints from residents. Women were not formally eligible to become Guardians until the passing of the Local Government Act in 1894.

As the Guardians were personally responsible for any mismanagement of funds, it was in their interest to run both Union and workhouse as efficiently as possible, ensuring that the requirements of the Poor Law Commission were met.

The usual order of business at each meeting was as follows:

1. Minutes of the last meeting
2. Any business arising from this
3. Existing Relief Applications
4. New Relief Applications
5. Report of the Workhouse Committee
6. Treasurer's Report
7. Any other business

The ratification of the workhouse constitution in 1837 designated the appointment of twenty Guardians for the Ashton Union, distributed across thirteen districts. Meetings of those elected were to be held in the Globe Inn. The first gathering was scheduled for 11am on the 10th February, 1838, during which time the chairman and vice-chairman were due to be selected.

## ***23rd February 1844, Nottingham Review***

**NEW SILVER COINAGE.–**  
The workmen at the Mint are daily at work in striking off the new silver coinage, a considerable amount of which has been sent to the Bank of England within the last few days. The panic respecting the light gold currency having subsided, the Bank will shortly give notice that they will issue the new silver coinage at the bullion-office, in exchange for the old coinage of George III. George IV., and William IV. The quantity of bullion at present in the Bank is nearly 16,000,000 sterling...



COU. LANC. 17  
PUA  
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Lancashire



# In Pursuance of an Act

of Parliament passed in the 4th and 5th Years of the Reign of His present Majesty KING WILLIAM THE FOURTH, intituled "An Act for the Amendment and better Administration of the Laws relating to the Poor in England and Wales," WE THE POOR LAW COMMISSIONERS FOR ENGLAND AND WALES, Do hereby Order and Declare, That the Parishes, Townships, and Places, the names of which, and the City, County, or Counties wherein they are situate, are specified in the margin of this Order, together with all Hamlets, Tythings, Liberties, or other Subdivisions, lying within, or belonging or adjacent to, any of the said Parishes, Townships, and Places, shall on the third day of February next be, and thenceforth shall remain united for the Administration of the Laws for the relief of the Poor, by the name of THE ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE UNION, and shall contribute and be assessed to a common fund for purchasing, building, hiring, or providing, altering, or enlarging, any workhouse or other place for the reception and relief of the poor of such Parishes, Townships, and Places, or for the purchase of any lands or tenements under and by virtue of the provisions of the said Act of or for such Union, and for the future upholding and maintaining of such workhouses or places aforesaid, and the payment or allowance of the Officers of such Union, and the providing of utensils and materials for setting the poor on work therein, and for any other expense to be incurred for the common use or benefit, or on the common account of such Parishes, Townships, and Places in the proportion of the several sums hereafter to be ascertained and declared by us the said Poor Law Commissioners to be the annual average expense incurred by each such Parish, Township, or Place for the relief of the poor belonging thereto for the three years ending on the twenty-fifth day of March next preceding the inquiry.

- In the County Palatine of Lancaster. {  
1. Ashton under Lyne.  
2. Droylsden.  
3. Denton.  
4. Haughton.
- In the County Palatine of Chester. {  
5. Duckingfield. x  
6. Stayley. x  
7. Newton. x  
8. Godley. x  
9. Hattersley.  
10. Mottram. x  
11. Matley.  
12. Hollingworth. x  
13. Tintwistle. x

OFFICE COPY



And We do hereby further Order and Declare, that a Board of Guardians of the poor of the said Union, shall be constituted and chosen according to the provisions of the Poor Law Amendment Act, and in manner hereinafter mentioned.

The Workhouse Constitution for the Ashton Union, signed and sealed by the Poor Law Commissioners on January 17th, 1837. Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives



## Ashton Union Board of Guardians

### 10th February 1837

At the first meeting of the Board of Guardians of the Ashton-under-Lyne Union held at the Globe Inn in Ashton-under-Lyne on Friday 10th Feb 1837, the following Guardians were returned and declared to be appointed –

#### Guardians

Mr James Broadbent	Parish of Ashton Under Lyne
Mr James Lord	Ditto
Mr John Grimshaw	Ditto
Mr John Andrew	Ditto
Mr James Hall	Ditto
Mr George Birtenshaw	Droylsden
Mr John Irwin	Denton
Mr C. H. Sidebottom	Haughton
Mr John Binns	Ditto
Mr Samuel Robinson	Dukinfield
Mr George Woolley	Ditto
Mr James Adshead	Staley
Mr Alfred Bennett	Ditto
Mr John Thorneley	Godley
Mr Thomas Bradley	Hattersley
Mr Joseph Harrison	Mottram
Mr James Woolley	Matley
Mr George Woodhead	Hollingworth
Mr Thomas Dearnaley	Tintwistle

It was Resolved that Mr James Lord be appointed Chairman, Mr John Binns be appointed Vice Chairman, and future meetings will be held on Fridays at 10 o'clock in the morning and for the present at the Globe Inn in Ashton-under-Lyne. Also that Mr Robert Worthington be appointed clerk to the Guardians.

### 15th March 1837, Manchester Guardian

ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE UNION.–

The overseers of the several parishes, townships, and places, comprised in the above union, and hereinafter named, will, in pursuance of the order of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales, proceed on the thirtieth day of March Instant, to the ELECTION of the NUMBER of the GUARDIANS of the POOR, set opposite the names of such parishes, and townships for the year ending March 30th, 1838.

Parish of Ashton-under-Lyne	5 guardians
Township of Droylsden	1 guardian
Township of Denton	1 guardian
Township of Haughton	1 guardian
Township of Dukinfield	3 guardians
Township of Staley	1 guardian
Township of Newton	2 guardians
Township of Godley	1 guardian
Township of Hattersley	1 guardian
Township of Matley	1 guardian
Township of Hollingworth	1 guardian
Township of Tintwistle	1 guardian

Any person entitled to vote in any of the said parishes, townships and places, may propose as guardian or guardians thereof, any number (not exceeding the number to be there elected) of persons who are severally rated to the poor rate of any parish, township or place in the union, in respect of property of the annual value or rental of £20. The proposal must be written, and must state the names, residences, and callings, of the persons proposed, and the name of the proposer and must be delivered to one of the overseers, on or before the 23rd day of March instant.... The forms of nomination papers, statements of owners, and appointment of proxy, may be seen and copied by voters at the Board Room, in the Globe Inn, Ashton-under-Lyne.

ROBERT WORTHINGTON, Clerk to the Board of Guardians. Ashton-under-Lyne, 13th March, 1837.

### 15th November 1845, Manchester Courier

THE ASHTON BOARD OF GUARDIANS.–

The first meeting of the Ashton poor-law guardians took place in the police-office, at the Town Hall, on Saturday morning, at which there were 14 out of 20 guardians present. Our reporter was refused admission.

### 14th January 1847

It was proposed that the meeting of the Board of Guardians be made in the meeting room at the Workhouse instead of the Town Hall.

**5th April 1848, Manchester Guardian**  
**ELECTION OF POOR LAW GUARDIANS.—**

For some days past, considerable interest has been created in Ashton and the neighbourhood in reference to the election of five gentlemen to serve the office of poor-law guardians for the township of Ashton during the forthcoming year. No less than seventeen gentlemen were nominated to the office, and all preparations for a contest were being made; but yesterday, several having sent in notes to the clerk, declining to serve the office, a number of others were seen and prevailed upon to retire also, that the parish might not be put to the expense of an election. The following gentlemen will therefore be elected without opposition, the Rev. J.R. Stephens, Messrs. F.W. Bromley, E. Whitehead, J.S. Stanley, and James Corry.

**20th April 1850, Manchester Guardian**  
**(Distribution of the Board of Guardians)**

Town's Division East Ward, 3 guardians  
Hartshead

Town's Division West Ward, 2 guardians each  
Audenshaw and Newton

Dukinfield 5 guardians

Knott's Lane, Denton, 1 guardian each  
Droylsden, Godley,  
Hattersley, Haughton,  
Hollingworth, Matley,  
Mottram, Staley,  
and Tintwistle

**23rd February 1844,  
Nottingham Review**

MONUMENT TO SIR ISAAC NEWTON—The town council of Grantham have granted a site on St. Peter's-hill for the erection of a statue to the memory of this great philosopher, and £100 for the preparation of the ground for its reception. About 200 years ago Sir Isaac was a free boy on the foundation of the Grantham Grammar School.

<b>Guardian</b>	<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Guardian</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
Thomas Wadsworth	27	Henry Bayley	23
James Shaw	33	Thomas Rowland	41
Samuel Kershaw	49	Randall Ridgway	38
B.M. Kenworthy	23	James Ogden	41
John Stanley	31	Thomas Hibbert	5
Ralph Kershaw	28	James Harrison	20
Obadiah Kirk	32	John Taylor	34
John Mayor	7	John Millburn	33
Matthew Binns	40	Thomas Cook	52
Henry Lees	19	Joseph Harrison	35
William Peacock	38	Thomas Marler	29
John Ousey (Master of the Workhouse)	41	James Mangham	3
A.B. Wimpenny	44	Thomas Dearnaley	25

**THE UNION WORK-HOUSE**

AND

**BOARD OF GUARDIANS SYSTEM,**

AS WORKED UNDER THE CONTROL OF

**POOR-LAW COMMISSIONERS;**

EXEMPLIFIED BY OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS AND PLAN:

WITH AN ADDRESS

TO

**SIR ROBERT PEEL.**

---

BY JOHN BOWEN. *X*

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" A dominant system, under which the poor may be destroyed with impunity, is not a system of government : but an audacious conspiracy against the sacred dominion of justice." \*  
EDMUND BURKE.

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**LONDON:**

PUBLISHED FOR THE AUTHOR, BY

**JOHN HATCHARD & SON, 187, PICCADILLY.**

1842.

Front cover of *The Union Work-House and Board of Guardians System, as Worked Under the Control of the Poor Law Commission* by John Bowen (1842). Credit: Google Books

**4th April 1863, Ashton Weekly Reporter**  
**ELECTION OF GUARDIANS.** To the Editor of the Reporter.

Sir,— The time for the election of a Board of Guardians is now at hand, and I am sure many of the working classes must have seen the necessity of having fair-play-loving men in that office during the past winter. Some of the individuals are now asking to be returned, in order that they may perpetuate their acts of the past winter, screwing down the poor unfortunate operatives to starvation point, and then prevent any generous-minded gentlemen from giving them any assistance from their own pocket in the shape of a little addition to the scanty allowance of the guardians, as they have hitherto done in the case of Messrs.

Sutcliffe, Reyner, Kenworthy and Whittaker, who would have gladly continued to assist their workpeople if the late guardians had not prevented them. Such being the case, I hope that the working men who have the suffrage in their hands will see it to be their duty to do their utmost to return the following gentlemen, who will, I am sure, act justly to both ratepayers and recipients:— Sutcliffe, Reyner, Kenworthy and Whittaker, For East Ward, James Dean, George Henry Kenworthy, Samuel Jackson; for West Ward, Nathaniel B. Sutcliffe, James Newton; for Hartshead, John Sandiford, Edwin Whittaker. By inserting this letter in the next impression of your valuable paper you will much oblige — Yours,

ALFRED KERSHAW.  
 50 Church-street, Ashton, April 2nd, 1863



ix.—*Notice of the Appointment and Return of Guardians.*

The overseers of each such parish, township, and place, shall forthwith notify to the Guardian or Guardians elected, the fact of his or their election by a letter or communication in writing, in the Form marked H, hereto annexed, signed by them; and shall affix on the principal door of every church and chapel in such parish, township, or place, a notice of the Guardian or Guardians elected, in the Form marked I, hereto annexed; and shall also make to the first meeting of the Board of Guardians next after such election, a return, in writing, in the Form marked J, hereto annexed, of the Guardian or Guardians so elected.

x.—*The first meeting of the Guardians.*

1. The first meeting of the Guardians shall be held at the Globe Inn, Ashton-under-Lyne, on the tenth day of February next, and shall commence at eleven o'clock in the forenoon, at which meeting every Guardian is hereby required to attend; but if three Guardians be present at such first meeting, the absence of the remainder shall not invalidate the proceedings of the meeting.

2. At the first meeting the Guardians shall determine upon some fixed day of the week, and some fixed hour, between ten o'clock in the forenoon and four o'clock in the afternoon, and also on some convenient place for holding their future meetings.

3. At the first meeting also, the Guardians shall elect out of their number a chairman and vice-chairman who shall continue to act in those capacities until the next annual election of Guardians shall take place.

4. The Guardians shall also at their first meeting, or as soon thereafter as conveniently may be, proceed to the election of their clerk, and to the exercise of the functions assigned to them by a certain Act, entitled "An Act for the Registration of Births, Deaths, and Marriages."

5. The Guardians shall not proceed to the appointment of any other officers than those above mentioned, or to assume the direction and controul of the relief of the poor, until the average annual expense of the parishes, townships, and places, in the Union, shall have been duly ascertained and declared, and until further Orders and Regulations shall have been issued by us in that behalf.

xi.—*Explanation of Terms.*

1. Whenever the signatures of the overseers are required in this order to be subscribed to any notice or other document appertaining in any manner to the said elections, it shall not be necessary that the signatures of more than two of them be subscribed to the same.

2. Whenever the word "parish," "township," or "place," are used in this order, they shall be taken to mean any parish, township, tything, hamlet, or place separately maintaining its poor, and hereinbefore directed to be united.

3. Whenever the day appointed by this Order for the performance of any act shall happen to be Sunday or Good Friday, such act shall be performed on the day next following the day so appointed.

Given under the Hands and Seal of Us, the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales, this seventeenth day of January, in the year One Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirty-seven.

(Signed)

J. Frankland Lewis

J. G. S. Sefwre

Geo. Nicholls



## Ashton Union Workhouse in the Press!

*What is both horrifying and fascinating is the war of words waged between the Poor Law Guardians and the local newspaper, the Ashton Reporter. The Guardians, as influential and wealthy members of the local area, did not take kindly to criticism, especially in connection with the Poor Law Union. Many of them had an almost evangelical zeal with which they approached the organisation and running of the workhouse, but not much compassion. When challenged by the Ashton Reporter through the medium of the newspaper, the Guardians did not always present themselves and their policies in the best light.*

### **23rd October 1858, Ashton Reporter**

To the Editor

Paupers' and Felons' Rations

Gentlemen:— Having read in your last paper an enquiry into the conduct of the master of the workhouse, I was much surprised that the guardians did not take the means to bring the accusers and the accused face to face, which would have been far more satisfactory to the public....

As regards the man Atkinson, who is now working for Mr Moorhouse, reedmaker in the town, he is prepared to come before any proper tribunal and substantiate his statement that whilst in the workhouse, in August last, though not being able to get from the day-room to the dining-room, which rooms are divided by a flight of 20 steps, he was left without food from Thursday the 5th to Saturday the 7th, and that the first he partook on the Saturday was brought to him without orders by an inmate who took pity on him, and brought him some porridge and milk. Whatever the guardians may think, this is too serious a matter to be allowed to drop without being inquired into....

Atkinson also complains ... that although suffering most severely from a chronic attack of rheumatism in his right leg, which in fact had compelled him to enter the workhouse, he was made to undress and stand in cold water whilst the assistant cleansed his body

and from which inhuman treatment he has not yet altogether recovered. It may be very well to frighten away vagrants from the house by making them undergo a cold bath over-night, and for well-fed guardians to indulge themselves in like manner, but it is shameful to drive a weak rheumatic almost mad by putting him in cold water....

I now come to the remarks of the chairman at the last meeting that there was no workhouse where the inmates fared so well as ours. I can, however, bring forward persons to prove that this is untrue – that in Stockport, Oldham and Bolton, the paupers are 20 per cent better fed than our own.... And it is a fact that the Poor Law Inspector, not long since complimented the Ashton guardians for keeping their poor for so little.... What a compliment! ... for our guardians now compel old men of 80 years of age, who formerly began after breakfast, to be at work, oakum picking, at six o'clock in the morning, and keep at it until six o'clock at night ... whilst felons only work from six to eight hours a day....

Yours respectfully,

Richard Pilling

199 Fleet St, Henry Square Oct 21st 1858

### **28th September 1867, Bury Times**

Mrs Ann Rumsey, who is described as a daughter of Capt Cook, the famous navigator, has just died at Colchester in her 104th year.

## 5th March 1859, Ashton Reporter

### Editorial

It is usually with reluctance that we open our leading columns to the criticism of such minor local business as is transacted before the Board of Guardians, because it is easy to find topics of more importance, and unpleasant to always be holding up to public notice the sayings and doings of gentlemen who voluntarily and disinterestedly give up a large amount of time to public service. But we are restrained by such scruples in the present instance, for on Thursday week the guardians solemnly invited the public to the examination of a mare's nest they had discovered, and, with all due gravity we are now prepared to assist in the exploitation. To begin with the beginning.

A well-known inhabitant of Ashton, Mr Richard Pilling of Henry Square, has constituted himself attorney-general for the subjects of the Board of Guardians, and apparently with growing success.... of course, there is no goodwill borne to him by the guardians, and their anger and petulance under his attacks sufficiently show how sorely they are felt. If the guardians were wise they would adopt a very different tone. It may offend their pride to be reproved by so humble and so poor a man as Richard Pilling; but if he has truth on his side, their insolence will only make the matter worse.

Losing hope, we suppose of a change in the hearts of the guardians, Mr Pilling addressed a letter to the Poor Law Board, and found in secretary, Lord Courtenay, an exceedingly attentive official. His chief complaint was that of the dietary – from which it is apparent that only 18oz of bread is allowed to each adult per week; and that in due consequence of the over-proportion of porridge a prejudicial effect is produced on the health and comfort of the inmates.... it is to be hoped therefore that the guardians will improve the diet of the inmates by giving them at least the quantity of bread referred to in Mr Pilling's letter of this week.... With a suspicious Poor Law Board above them, a refractory household under them, and a newspaper press ever ready to publish complaints, it is eminently unwise of the guardians to spend their time squabbling with Richard Pilling.... he has beaten them; while the public laughs at the contest and gives three cheers for Pilling and less porridge.

Ashton-under-Lyne, Feb. 9th, 1859.

**To the Poor Law Board.**  
Gentlemen:—I wish to bring before you a case that happened in our workhouse on the 22nd January last. One Patrick Lynch was taken sick at ten o'clock in the forenoon; at two o'clock there was no doctor sent for and no coroner's inquest held, and he was 90 years old. The inmates consider such conduct disgraceful of our officials, and they believe were they happened to be sick they would be treated in the same way; and when any one falls sick, it is a common saying amongst the paupers if the doctor orders any nourishment, such as porter or wine, "Oh, they will not live above a day or two,"—their meaning is, they must have none if they are not going to die. And again, they complain of being both short of food and having too much of the porridge, for they have them 13 times per week, and has only 18 ounces of bread in a week, and it causes the inmates to have the itch, besides having to get up in the night from two to six times every night to make water. They have had the itch in the house for the last four months, but it is not only the opinion of the paupers, but of ratepayers, both rich and poor, that the treatment of our poor is more disgraceful by some of our guardians and officials, for it is a common saying amongst the working classes of this district to say that the greatest crime in this district is to be poor, for felons are better kept, better treated, and less worked; and if our criminals were sent to workhouses and our paupers to prisons, it would be more just than to be treated as they are. I hope, gentlemen, you will be so kind as to desire our guardians to alter our dietaries for those under 60 years of age, for in our workhouse the paupers are worse fed of any paupers within 40 miles of this district.

I see by the papers there is going to be amendment of the Poor Laws with respect to settlement, which is very much wanted. I will give you an instance of a family that was removed from this town. James Boomer, with a wife and five small children, and removed to Chatham about twelve months since, at an expense of £10, although he was born in this town, but he happened to remove into Dukinfield because of his work. So you see he lost his five years' settlement because his father had served apprenticeship in Chatham and gained a settlement there. Well, after being six months in Chatham Workhouse, a friend of his sent him a letter—if he could make his way down here he could find him work as a joiner. Well, he got his discharge, and he had to beg his bread all the way here, with his wife and five children, and was three weeks on the road.—(Signed.)

RICHARD PILLING, Henry Square.

Letter from Richard Pilling to the Poor Law Board reproduced in the Ashton Reporter (19th February 1859).

Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

*Richard Pilling (1799–1874) was a Lancashire hand loom weaver and Chartist. As a result of his participation in strikes and protests and subsequent blacklisting in the Stockport area, Pilling and his family moved to Ashton. Here he was successful in sourcing employment, although poorly compensated. He believed that a 'fair day's pay for a fair day's work' could only be achieved through political reform. Together with other trade union activists, he became a key figure in local and national movements, fighting for the rights of the working man.*

*How the Guardians must have dreaded the adverse publicity generated by Richard Pilling! He was highly experienced in holding matters to account. From various sources including pronouncements and edicts from the Guardians, he realised that there was much to improve in the running of the workhouse. He was a formidable enemy and one that the Guardians could not easily dismiss.*

### **23rd July 1859, Ashton Reporter**

On Thursday morning, our reporter attended the Board of Guardians as usual, and was engaged in taking notes of a discussion respecting the apprenticing of certain children, whose services had been applied for. While thus engaged, he was addressed in a most insolent and unwarrantable manner by the chairman, Mr Abel Buckley Wimpenny, in words to the following effect:— 'If private conversation be reported again, and the other guardians will join with me, you shall go out at that door'. A dead silence followed this explosion, not a guardian supported his proposal, and our reporter made no remarks.... At the close of the meeting Mr Wimpenny resumed the offensive, when our reporter asked him to state what [these] private conversations had been.

### **16th July 1859, Western Daily Press**

Excursions To Scotland, &c.— It will be seen by advertisement that Mr Cook's second Scotch excursion train will leave Bristol on Monday July 25th. Mr Cook has just completed his first series of tours in Scotland for 1859, and, as usual, has been accompanied through the Highlands by a large party of ladies and gentlemen, the former greatly preponderating in numbers....

### **7th May 1864, Ashton Reporter**

#### *Guardians and Philanthropists*

The Board of Guardians amused themselves last week with the solution of a riddle which their chairman propounded in the form of a remark that Mr Rountree, of Leeds, had been up to the workhouse, for what purpose he did not know. The oracle of the board, as the guardian who responds to all such remarks must be considered, did not relieve the chairman's difficulty to any great extent, for his clerical judgement went no further than to declare Mr Rountree "a philanthropist." The public must excuse the evident gap in the Rev Mr. Radley's knowledge, for his tastes and studies cannot be supposed to have brought him into much contact with philanthropists,

but the name was enough for the ever vigilant chairman, who appears to have a shuddering horror of philanthropists, and he decreed that this dangerous and revolutionary character shall not be allowed to enter the walls of the bastille until Mr Seymour had examined him, and then he must enter upon the visitor's book a full, true, and particular account of who and what he is. We may therefore conclude that Mr Joseph Rountree, or any other person suspected of philanthropy, shall ever present himself at the workhouse door; the guardians will immediately put the neighbourhood on its guard. He shall be described from boot to beaver, his height and weight taken, the colour of his eyes, and the length of his whiskers.... What a debt of gratitude we owe to the chairman of the Board of Guardians....

It is true that the actual aspect of the agitator who has dreadfully disturbed Mr Bradbury's nerves is so very placid and gentle that it is difficult to imagine what harm he could do.... If our readers have read from interest the proceedings of the Board of Guardians as diligently and regularly for the last three years as we have done from duty, they must often have been disgusted with the low vulgarity, the great coarseness and the ill-timed and heartless levity of our guardians of the poor....

By compelling Mr Rountree or any similar visitor, to apply for admission formally to the Clerk of the Guardians, time may be gained to put awkward matters out of the way, and perhaps as incivility and obstruction is successful in many cases, they may think to try it on with this good Quaker. We rather believe that if this is their object, they will find themselves mistaken. The Friends are not the men to be huffed off easily. Mr Rountree's letter already published really contained very little that had special reference to Ashton Union. He did say that at Ashton and many other places, the guardians systematically disobeyed the order which requires them to furnish destitute vagrants with a morning's meal as well as a night's lodging. Even on the Sabbath morning they are turned out empty and destitute.

He also commented upon the want of a sufficient dietary, and alluded to the startling disparity between the food of a convict in Belle Vue Prison and that of a pauper in the Ashton Workhouse. He hinted that there was both scant and waste in the management at Chamber Hill.... he suggested that an uncomfortable large allowance of suet pudding might be reduced by substituting a small allowance of bread and cheese. He advised that bread should be always made in the workhouse. Because of these apparently simple suggestions offered in the best possible spirit Mr Rountree is shut out of the workhouse....

In another department where the Ashton establishment is grossly deficient, Mr Rountree has provoked wrath by his remarks. The imbeciles, invalids and children are greatly neglected, the attendants are not sufficiently numerous, and there is a lack of care for the comfort and welfare of the inmates, which is very much to be regretted.

*Joseph Rowntree (1843–1925) was a Quaker and major leading figure in social reform throughout the nineteenth century. He worked in the family chocolate business, Rowntree's of York, but much of his life was spent campaigning for social change to relieve poverty. He actively wrote and published letters and articles, highlighting the appalling exploitation of the poor. He tried to give them a voice through his work and was renowned as a 'true' philanthropist.*



Joseph Rowntree in 1862. Credit: Wikipedia



# Members of the Ashton Union Board of Guardians

## John Bradbury (1818–1878): Chairman of the Board of Guardians

### *2nd November 1878, North Cheshire Herald* Death of Mr. John Bradbury J.P.

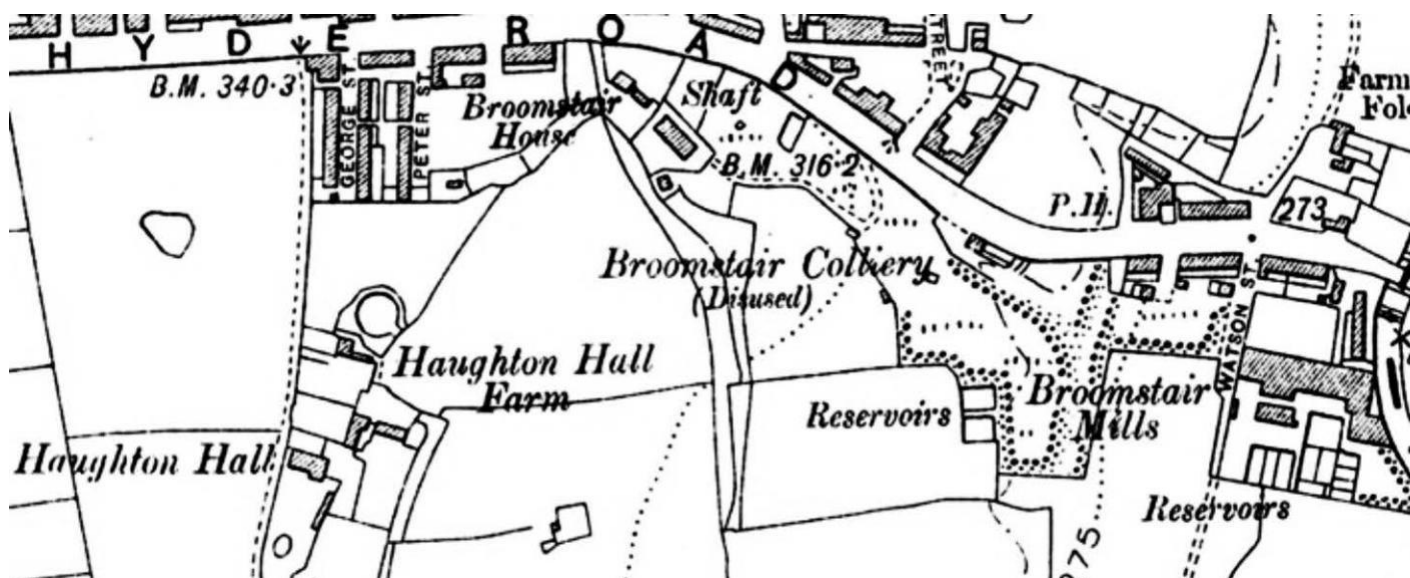
Mr. John Bradbury expired on 28th October, 1878, at his residence, Haughton House, Lord Street, Southport, in his sixtieth year. This announcement will be received with no ordinary feeling by most of our readers in Hyde and Denton, and will revive the recollection of one who, a few years ago, occupied the position of one of the most extensive coal proprietors in this neighbourhood.

*On the 1861 census John Bradbury is described as a coal proprietor employing 350 men and 5 boys at the Broomstairs Colliery, Hyde and Clayton Pit, Manchester.*

The deceased was a native of Clayton, Manchester (born 1818) and was the son of an engineer, who possessed a proprietary

interest in the Clayton Colliery. Although possessed of ample means, after giving his sons a liberal education, he made them work for a living, and John was apprenticed to a joiner and builder. Thus he acquired a sound knowledge which distinguished his useful career. After serving his apprenticeship, he may be said to have begun his life in conjunction with his father as he ultimately succeeded in business and entered into partnership with Mr. Silas Leigh of Swinton, Manchester.... Thirty-five years ago he and his partner commenced working the Peacock pit, and five years later saw them working the Hyde Colliery also, and his energy, enterprise, perception, and perseverance enabled them to achieve such genuine success that ultimately they became possessed of the whole of the mines in connection with the Hyde and Broomstairs mines.

*According to the 1871 census, John Bradbury named his house on Hyde Road 'Broomstairs.'*



1910 Six-inch Lancashire Ordnance Survey Map showing Broomstairs House – the home of John Bradbury – and his former colliery of the same name. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

We could not hope to recount many incidents in his career, for much of it is unknown to us, but as a tribute to his memory it should be recorded that he was a good master.... His workpeople were all kept in employment during the cotton panic, and at that time he was an active member of the Relief Committee at Hyde.... His first wife having died without issue in 1856, he married the daughter of the late John Taylor, of Moorfield, Haughton. Both in public and private life he was of an unostentatious disposition, but his intelligence and capacity for business found recognition in local affairs, as he was looked upon as considerate and straightforward. He was at one time chairman of the Hyde Local Board, and for a long period, Chairman of the Ashton Board of Guardians. Such was the estimation in which he was held by that body, that when he retired into private life, they entertained him to dinner and presented him with a testimonial of regard. Some ten years ago he was honoured with the Commission of the Peace, and as a magistrate, has rendered good service. In politics, he was Conservative, but never obtruded his views, and was remarkable for his toleration.... His widow is an Independent, and he was a Churchman; but above all, they were both Christians. His son died at eight years of age, and was interred at Christ Church. As proof of his fatherly affection, he placed a very beautiful and costly memorial window in the chancel.... Again at Hope Chapel, of which his wife was a member, his daughter laid the foundation stone.... The deceased was a very worthy and upright man. About eighteen months ago, he had a family vault prepared to his own satisfaction, and had raised over the tomb one of the finest monuments in the cemetery at Southport, where his interment took place.

*He died leaving a personal estate of around £90,000.*

John Bradbury's long career of public service was not entirely without controversy, however. In 1859, he was cited by the auditor of the accounts of the Board of Guardians as responsible for the approval of 'illegal payments' unsanctioned by the Poor Law Commission.

### **8th January 1859, Ashton Reporter**

I [the auditor] do hereby certify that in the accounts of the guardians of the poor of the Ashton-under-Lyne Union I have disallowed the several sums of 2s. 6d., 10s. 6d., 5s., £16., £1 6s., £1 5s., and £10 10s., as payments illegally made out of the funds of such union; and I find that John Bradbury, of Haughton, near Manchester, coal proprietor, was one of the guardians who authorized the making of each of such illegal payments, and having previously given notice in writing by post to the said John Bradbury of my intention to surcharge him, I do hereby surcharge the said John Bradbury with the said several sums above mentioned. Any my reason for disallowing the above several sums of 2s. 6d. and 5s., payments for cabs for conveying dissenting ministers to the workhouse; of 10s. 6d., for a box at the post office for a relieving officer; of £1 and 5s., payments of expenses of candidates for attending the election of workhouse master and matron, is that there is not any authority in law for these payments; and I also consider that the box at the post office is unnecessary; and my reason for disallowing the above sums of £1 6s. and £1 6s., payments to John Turner, a servant at the workhouse, and of £10 10s., a subscription to the Manchester Eye Hospital, is that they are payments without the consent of the Poor Law Board.



Entrance to Christ Church, Ashton. Credit: Susan Essex

## **Enoch Hemingway (1813-1874): Poor Law Guardian**

Enoch Hemingway was born in Ashton, August 15th, 1813, the son of Richard Hemingway, who was a boot and shoe manufacturer, and Elizabeth Radcliffe. His father was an active member of the Order of Royal Foresters. Brought up at 40 Church Street, Richard died when Enoch was aged twenty and he became responsible for running the business. This grew to be a very successful enterprise.

### **25th March 1865, Ashton Reporter**

#### *Deaths*

On the 20th inst, at Jackson Street, Jane, wife of Mr Enoch Hemingway, aged 57 years. Bro. Hemingway's life has not been all sunshine; but the darkest cloud was that of losing his partner in life, March 20th, 1865, after a twenty-seven-year partnership. He was left with a daughter and five sons to mourn her loss. One of man's greatest blessings on earth is a good and faithful wife; such as our brother lost when his wife died.

### **11th April 1868, Ashton Reporter**

The chairman also moved "That this board desires to acknowledge the services.... of Mr Enoch Hemingway who has shown great interest in his duties as a guardian since his election in 1864, and from his extensive knowledge of the applicants of relief in the town, has been especially useful upon the relief committee.

*Enoch Hemingway was elected as a Poor Law Guardian for the Market Ward of Ashton between 1864–1868. As a Conservative, he was also appointed an Ashton Town Councillor, serving on the Sanitary Committee for the same ward between 1864–1873, when he retired from public life. He was also a member of the Independent Order of Oddfellows, joining the society in 1823 and 'had served all the offices in lodge and district.'*

### **27th June 1874, Ashton Reporter**

#### *Ancient Order of Foresters*

The next court night subsequent to the death of his father he was proposed in the same court which [Richard Hemingway] had been a member of, and initiated the following court

night, March, 1833. He soon became a useful member, committed the lectures and making ceremony to memory.... and when the order changed its name from Royal Foresters to Ancient Foresters at the reformation in 1834, he was soon after appointed secretary to the court. After serving the office for many years he was obliged to relinquish it on account of business engagements....

### **Ancient Order of Foresters**

*This body was formed from a much older society, the Royal Order of Ancient Foresters, founded around 1745. Members believed that they had a duty to help fellow members of society 'as they walked through the forests of life.' The main purpose of the group, apart from providing social support, was to assist with the unemployment of members and provide financial help to the family. It is still in existence today as the Foresters Friendly Society.*

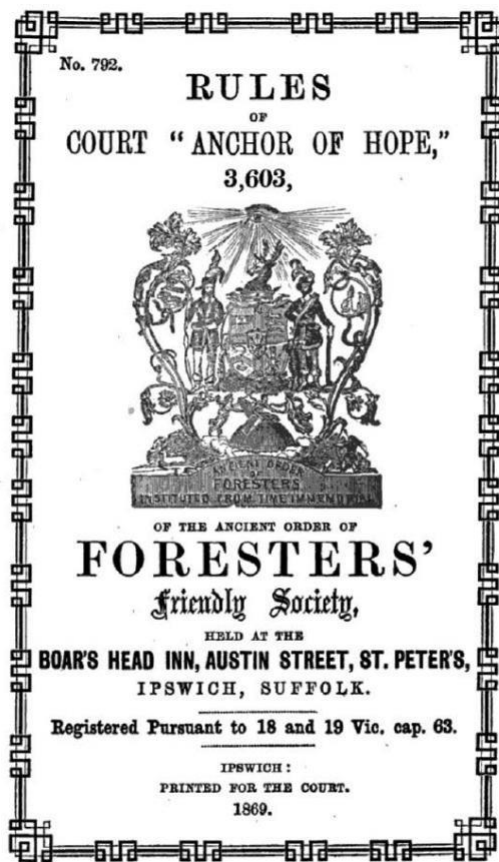
Bro. Hemingway was one of the committee that established a Widow and Orphans' Fund in the Ashton-under-Lyne district 25 years since, which is now in good financial condition, and has been the means of rendering comfort and joy to many widows and helpless orphans. He is also a trustee for the district, and secretary of his court. Bro. Hemingway has had in his time some pleasing and painful duties to perform, amongst which may be mentioned appearing before the relief committees for brothers in distress, upon two occasions for loss of limb, and two for loss of sight....

In 1861 Bro. Hemingway retired from business, and one of the first honours conferred upon him subsequent to his retirement, was being elected to serve on the Manorial Relief Committee, which he served without fee or reward until the close, never being absent from his post – that of dispensing assistance to those on the funds. He was elected one of those guardians of the poor, which at that time was no sinecure, as thousands had to be relieved during the [cotton] panic, which occupied the time of the guardians from early morning until midnight, which office he served for several years, and upon his retirement received the unanimous thanks of the board for the services he had rendered, both on the Relief and Workhouse Committees.



His five sons all chose law as their profession, working in London and America. The eldest, Richard, was employed as the town clerk of Bewdley, Worcestershire.

Enoch Hemingway was a very shrewd and successful businessman, retiring at the early age of forty-eight years. He had also expanded into property and owned more than twenty houses in the Ashton area. The newspaper lists his death as 'resulting from apoplexy.' Whatever condition this may have indicated, it is recorded that he died very suddenly and unexpectedly in 1874. His funeral was held at Christ Church, Ashton.



Front cover of an 1869 membership manual for the Ancient Order of Foresters in Ipswich entitled, Rules of Court "Anchor of Hope." Credit: Google Books

## The Reverend Charles Henry Lomax (1820-1908): Poor Law Guardian

Charles Henry Lomax (C.H. Lomax) was born on July 3rd, 1820, in Halesowen, a large market town in the West Midlands. He was one of the sons of Mary and John Lomax, the latter of whom was a master of the local grammar school for over forty years.

In 1837, whilst Charles was staying with a relative in Hertfordshire, he set up a small school at the age of 17. He ran this for twelve years and during that time he educated himself, with assistance from the local curate, in Latin, Greek and Mathematics, until he became a proficient classical scholar. In 1848 he was introduced to Canon Nathaniel Woodward who invited him to join the St. Nicholas College Scheme in Sussex for aspiring priests, and the following year he was ordained by the Bishop of Chichester. In 1850, together with Canon Woodward who founded eleven schools for the middle classes, Charles moved to Hurstpierpoint to start a school for boys (St. John's Middle School), now known as Hurstpierpoint College. He was second master there for ten years.

In 1860 Charles accepted an offer of a living from Peter Hoare, the London banker, and he duly became curate-in-charge at Clayton Parish in Manchester. There had previously been a clergyman in the family as Charles's grandfather served as rector in the Leek area. For twelve years he lived at Clayton Hall, which formerly belonged to Humphrey Cheetham. During that time Richard Hoare, patron and principal landowner of the parish, erected at his own cost the large and magnificent Church of St Cross. Charles was an enthusiastic and popular priest, attracting large congregations both on Sundays and in the week.

### 24th July 1908, Leominster News

'The large congregations he used to attract on Sundays and weekdays speak for themselves, and the surplice choir of numerous men and boys under my uncle's supervision are still remembered by the older generation.'

*C.H. Lomax was also an astute businessman and was a patron of the Manchester & Salford Bank for Savings and Government Annuities.*

## THE CHURCH.

At the Diocesan Registry, Manchester, on Tuesday last, the Lord Bishop of Manchester licensed the Rev. Charles Henry Lomax to the stipendiary curacy of the parish church of Droylsden, and to officiate in a school at Clayton, in that parish.

Announcement in the Glossopdale Chronicle and North Derbyshire Reporter (8th December 1860) naming the Reverend C.H. Lomax curate of the parish church in Droylsden. Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

### **6th February 1869, Ashton Reporter**

Letter to the paper by a resident of Clayton: 'I believe it is no crime for our minister to be a guardian of the poor, for the post is a very honourable one, and one which ought to be filled by one of the wisest and best men among us, and our minister knows the wishes of the ratepayers and the wants of the poor better than any other man.... because he visits and sees them for himself. He is also suitable for the post by his kind yet firm bearing, sound judgment and the large experience he has had in dealing with people in the various conditions of life in which he has been placed.'

*In 1872 Bishop Fraser offered him the living of St. John the Baptist Church in Heaton Norris, Stockport, after he had refused the same at*

*both Denton and Durham. Whilst Charles was at Heaton Norris, the church schools were much extended and improved.*

Offices held included:

Member of the Ashton Board of Guardians (1862-1870)  
Member of the Stockport Board of Guardians  
Member of the Building Committee of Heaton Norris Local Board  
Surrogate and Proctor in Convocation for the Archdeaconry of Manchester  
Commissioner under Pluralities Act  
Assessor under the Clergy Discipline Act  
Secretary of St. Mary's Home, Rusholme  
Treasurer of the Manchester Clergy Society for more than 20 years  
Secretary of the Manchester Clergy Book Club for more than 30 years

*On his 87th birthday in July 1907, he was persuaded to resign. Parishioners raised £540 to support him in retirement, a sum which bought a life annuity and pension. He then went to stay with his nephew, Edwin Preece Lloyd, a solicitor, in Leominster where he died on July 9th 1908. C.H. Lomax never married.*



Church of St. Cross, Clayton. C.H. Lomax served here as curate-in-charge. Credit: Wikipedia

## **Thomas Walton Mellor (1816-1902): Poor Law Guardian**

Thomas Walton Mellor was born in Ashton-under-Lyne in 1816, the second eldest of five children born to parents Mary and Thomas. His father was a well-known cotton manufacturer, establishing the firm Mellor and Earnshaw with a partner in 1817 on the corner of Gas Street, Ashton. In 1823 the company became known as Thomas Mellor and Sons.

Census details reveal that in 1841, aged 25, Thomas Walton Mellor was living with his family in Ashton and working as a cotton weaver. On November 25th, 1846, he married Jane Leigh of Compstall Road, Hayfield, at Glossop Parish Church (her father Edward Leigh was a cotton mill manager in the latter town). By 1851, aged 35, Thomas Walton Mellor had risen to become a cotton manufacturer and magistrate with a son, John, born in that same year. He also served on the committee of the Manchester, Burnley, Settle and Carlisle Railway, giving his address as Hall Courts, Ashton in their records for 1845.

### **12th July 1845, Manchester Courier**

New Magistrates for Cheshire.— At the Cheshire Quarter Sessions last week, Thomas Walton Mellor, Esq., of Ashton-under-Lyne... qualified as magistrate for this county.

*It is obvious that Thomas Walton Mellor took a great interest in the political life of the borough, being himself a staunch Conservative.*

### **6th January 1847, Manchester Courier**

Ashton Conservative Association Annual Dinner... took place on Friday last in the Pitt and Nelson Inn, Ashton.... The chair was occupied by Mr Thomas Walton Mellor....

*By 1854, he was living on Katherine Street, Ashton. This was followed by another move to Oldham Road in 1858. His mandatory property qualification for inclusion on the electoral register was described as ‘a share of freehold houses and land in Micklehurst and Stalybridge.’*

### **7th August 1858, Ashton Reporter**

Subscription in aid of a fund for purchasing gun carriages for the Crimean Trophies, and for mounting them on the pedestals in front of the town hall.

Thomas Walton Mellor 10s

*Two daughters, Mary and Alice, were added to the family in 1856 and 1861, respectively. In 1862, as owner and manager of the firm, he moved to Gas Street, Ashton to be nearer to his cotton mill. As a justice of the peace he was an ex officio Poor Law Guardian and was not elected by vote. As a key local figure during this period, Thomas Walton Mellor did not shy away from courting controversy.*

### **22nd November 1862, Ashton Reporter**

T.W. MELLOR, THE SNEERING EX-OFFICIO. It is not to be expected that any amount of suffering among their poorer neighbours should allay the rancorous feelings which are cherished by a few of the wealthier men of this neighbourhood against their more popular rivals.... The attacks upon

JOHN WHITTAKER, Esq., of Hurst, and N.B. Sutcliffe, Esq., by Mr Ex-Officio Guardian THOMAS WALTON MELLOR, on Monday, were not dirtier than usual, but they had all the dirtiness that distinguishes the doings of the party of which that not very remarkable personage is a leader.... What T.W. MELLOR thinks a proper measure of relief for the poor may be gathered from his calculations respecting the parties in his own employment. As the First of November showed, they are his, body and soul, for two days' work a week, but as the relief enjoyed by those out of work amounts in fortunate cases to nearly as much as their earnings... their master considers it would be an act of justice and humanity to put his people on a par with others by turning them into the streets. There is just one difficulty in the case. If any of the poor get as much as one-third of their wages in relief it is not from the guardians alone....

He [John Whittaker] is meanly accused of "parading his charity with flying colours...." This monstrous charge was gravely and distinctly made by THOMAS WALTON MELLOR. So far as the "parade of charity" is concerned, that individual is perfectly safe from retort. He never will have any charity to parade....



The conduct of the guardians is unwise, but the behavior of the Tories is malignant, and the combined efforts of both, so far as they have effect, must be to aggravate the sufferings of the poor.... This is not Toryism; it is MELLORISM.



Thomas Walton Mellor, London Stereoscopic and Photographic Company, albumen carte-de-visite, 1860s. Credit: National Portrait Gallery, London

**27th June 1863, Ashton Reporter**  
*Editorial*

Mr Thomas Walton Mellor often amuses us at breakfast on Saturday morning.... We consider Mr Thomas a great institution and a very amiable one too when he is the best side out, the Board of Guardians of this union ought to think him inestimable. His erudition, wit, classical allusions, his set speeches on everything in general, and on general nothings in particular, must relieve very much their conversational, hum-drum mode of business. The particularly spicy and flippanant jokes at the expense of the poor paupers, and of the public press... must be particularly exhilarating.

We think Thomas Walton Mellor intends to be amusing, and we therefore laugh at his sayings and doings, but in the interest of soberness and common sense, we are compelled to ask whether we are not foolish in doing so....

At Dukinfield Thomas Walton Mellor was, as usual, one of the chief speakers, and we think as usual, one of the most erratic. He thought that... property in Lancashire, Cheshire and Derbyshire should not be mortgaged for thirty years to come to meet the present cost of relief of the poor; and he said that government threw all the onus on property owners. We demur to these statements.... We should think that not less than two million sterling in money and kind has been distributed to maintain our poor, over and above that disbursed parochially. This has been a relief to property owners, and especially to the owners and occupiers of large manufactories, on whom in the main the burden would have fallen; and being distributed independently of the Guardians of the Poor, it has been eminently conservative of the mill owners' interest by keeping the "hands" in the district.... Does Mr Thomas Walton Mellor in the face of this expect a national rate or free grants from the treasury to relieve him and property owners generally from a fair responsibility....

It is said that Lancashire manufacturers will empty workhouses and foundling hospitals for profit; but when the people cease to be serviceable, they propose to shirk their municipal and parochial duties, button up and send the people to the devil.

*Thomas Walton Mellor was elected as a Conservative MP in the 1868 general election, standing down after twelve years' service in 1880. He was the first Conservative MP for Ashton-under-Lyne, succeeding the Liberal MP Thomas Milner Gibson. He was a controversial choice for many in the borough. Shortly after becoming a politician, he moved to 'The Raynors,' Taunton Road, Ashton.*

**3rd April 1869, Ashton Reporter**

The Conservatives of this parliamentary borough led a monster demonstration on Monday, in the Portland Street mills, to celebrate the return of Mr Thomas Walton Mellor, the first Conservative member for this town.



### **17th April 1869, Ashton Reporter**

He [Hugh Mason] said.... They must wipe out the thought that a finished gentleman, a wise statesman, an experienced politician, who had spent more than a quarter of a century in patriotic services to his country [Thomas Milner Gibson] should be set aside in order that a non-entity like Thomas Walton Mellor should take his place.... Mr. Thomas Walton Mellor up to this moment had never once appeared before the constituency of Ashton-under-Lyne.... When he was undergoing his candidature he was not to be seen, and... he might say that his honest conviction was, that during the whole of that period he was skulking and shamming, and keeping out of the gaze of the public.... An election would sooner or later take place and Mr. Thomas Walton Mellor would be sent back to the obscurity from which he had been temporarily drawn....

*By 1891 he had retired from politics and all local offices, and was listed as still living at 'The Raynors' on Taunton Road. Ten years later, he was described as a 'widower living on his own means,' with three servants. Retired life was very comfortable for Thomas Walton Mellor – he spent much of his time at his second home in Denbighshire. He died there on February 17th, 1902, having lived a long life spanning Queen Victoria's reign, and was buried at Christ Church, Ashton on February 20th of that year. At this time, the workhouse was still in place, but it would only be ten years before the institution itself would be disbanded and care of the poor handed over to the county authorities.*

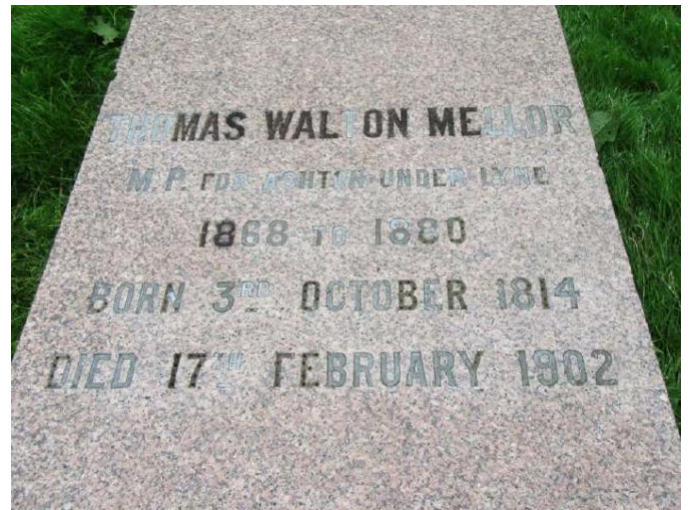
### **22nd February 1902, Ashton Reporter**

Mellor – On the 17th instant, at his residence, The Raynors, Ashton under Lyne, and of Tan-y-Bryn, Abergele, North Wales, THOMAS WALTON MELLOR, Member of Parliament for Ashton-under-Lyne, 1868–80, in his 88th year.

Gas Street and Whitelands Road were closed, and the workpeople attended the church in large numbers to pay their last respects to their master.... the coffin being borne from the residence close by the church to the graveside by a staff of workpeople from Gas Street and Whitelands Mills....

The death of Mr T.W. Mellor deprives us of one of the very few “ancients” now left to us in Ashton. With the one exception of the late Mr Hugh Mason, no such distinguished Ashtonian has been known in Ashton within the memory of anyone now living. These two were the great protagonists in the politics of the borough for thirty or forty years.... Mr Mellor's speeches were comparatively few, but they reveal many signs of careful literary treatment. The form of them was admirable, and as a wit and satirist none could approach him. He was always caustically amusing and frequently one could hardly guess whether he was talking ironically or seriously.

*Probate was granted to his son, John Edward Mellor of 'The Grange,' Hurst, and Charles Henry Booth, solicitor of Ashton. As a former MP, his death was reported nationwide.*



The grave of Thomas Walton Mellor, Christ Church, Ashton-under-Lyne. Credit: Susan Essex

### **Reverend Thomas Radley (1829–1879): Poor Law Guardian**

#### **28th May 1864, Ashton Reporter**

*Rev T Radley*

*'Oh, what a shame it is that a man such as this should have "rev" attached to his name.... I think "O" would be more appropriate to his character than "rev," then it would read "Oppressor Tyrant Radley;" and I think that this would be his right name while he alters his conduct.*

*A Ratepayer and Sufferer from the Present Crisis*

The Reverend Thomas Radley was the eldest son of Mary and Samuel Radley. His parents were devout Methodists. The family resided at Radley House, Sheffield, during

which time Thomas was educated at the Grammar School. He went on to attend St. Bees College in Cumbria (Crockford's Clerical Directory gives the date as 1851) – St. Bees was established in 1816 as the first theological college outside Oxford and Cambridge – although for some unspecified reason he did not graduate. In 1854, he was appointed as a tutor at Bishop's College, British Guiana before returning to England. By 1858, he was employed as a tutor at the Wesley College in Sheffield, teaching Latin and Mathematics. In that same year, he married Elizabeth Ollerenshaw, whose uncle was the late Samuel Ollerenshaw, cotton manufacturer, of Droylsden. She had been bequeathed a considerable sum by the latter, and Thomas Radley and Elizabeth lived on the wealthy Park Parade, Ashton, in comfortable circumstances with Sarah Ann Ollerenshaw, Elizabeth's mother, the owner of the property. He accepted a curacy at the nearby St. Peter's Church. Soon afterwards, Thomas was transferred to St. John the Evangelist, Hurst, in the diocese of Manchester, from which position he sought ordination.

#### **15th July 1858, Dorset County Chronicle**

Radley–Ollerenshaw June 26th at Trinity Church, Southport, the Rev Thomas Radley, of Radley House, Sheffield to Elizabeth, only daughter of the late Charles Ollerenshaw Esq., Droylsden.

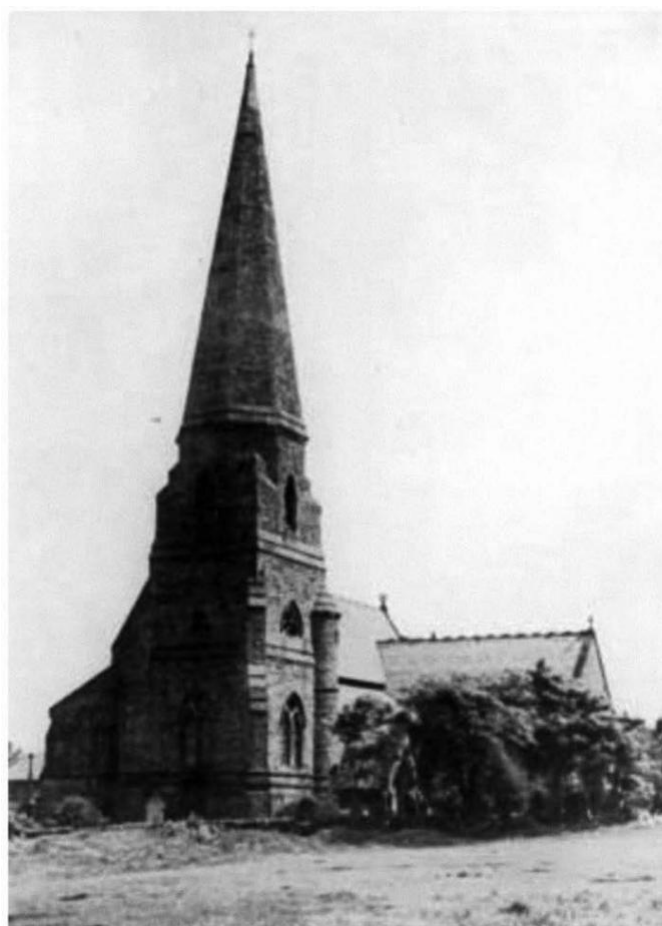
*By the time of the 1871 census, Elizabeth and Thomas had moved to Stamford Villa, Ashton. There were now five children – two daughters and three sons. Sadly, another daughter, their eldest Beatrice, died in 1869.*

#### **24th July 1869, Ashton Reporter**

Radley – On the 20th inst., aged 10 years, Beatrice Victoria, eldest daughter of the Rev T Radley J.P., Stamford Villa

*A memorial window for Beatrice and her grandmother was fitted in the church of St Michael and All Angels, Ashton. The money for the structure was given by Elizabeth, wife of Reverend Thomas Radley in 1871.*

*As a stipendiary curate in 1871, Thomas Radley was licensed by the Bishop of Manchester to the Parish Church of Ashton, St. Michael and All Angels. Despite this senior role attached to the diocesan 'mother church,' he*



Church of St. John the Evangelist, Hurst, Ashton-under-Lyne, exterior. Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

*was subsequently transferred to St George's, Stalybridge, where we are told that he felt he could make the most impact in his ministry.*

#### **Cotton Relief**

Rev Thomas Radley was elected a Poor Law Guardian in 1862, and for eight years represented the East Ward of Ashton. Although a conscientious man of many interests, he nevertheless attracted criticism both in the local press and amongst the working class. This came to the fore during the cotton famine (1860–1864) and its impact on the North West region. In the Ashton Union, the Guardians discussed the withdrawal of relief from the employees of Messrs. Leech of Stalybridge on the grounds that the company had offered a small amount of extra money to the workers since the 'cotton distress' began. Feelings thus ran very high amongst those engaged by the firm and the local press. One of the most prominent voices arguing for the removal of this support was Thomas Radley. His intransigence was singled out by the newspapers, who remarked at the seeming absence of his Christian sensibilities.

### **9th May 1864, Ashton Reporter**

A Ratepayer

'But the unsympathetic soul of the Rev T Radley ... crops up at every corner.... When men such as these are elected to parish office, we may emphatically exclaim "Good Lord deliver us."

The Rev T Radley says, 'We are put in a strange fix. The people get 1s 6d from the relief committee, bringing it up to 3s, and then come here and want us to give them the 1s 6d from Leeches', which would make 4s 6d. I say I will not do it, so there's an end of it.'

### **21st May 1864, Ashton Reporter**

The Rev T Radley's Conscience

To the Editor of the Reporter

'Sir – having looked over the proceedings of the guardians in last week's issue.... I feel extremely sorry to find such men as the Rev T Radley opposed to men having a little extra.... What a pity we have such men preaching the gospel.'

### **11th June 1864, Ashton Reporter**

A letter from the Rev Thomas Radley to the Ashton Reporter:

'Sir;– For the last month you have in your letter column.... singled me out from the rest of the guardians for the lion's share of abuse.... A guardian does not sit to give relief according to his own generous feeling, but according to law. He has simply to carry out the provisions of the poor law, and if he violates those provisions he is liable to pay out of his own pocket the excess. He is not distributing his own money so he must distribute it according to law and custom; he is simply in trust for the ratepayers.... Don't blame the guardians and me especially for doing at Ashton what is universally done elsewhere. Why single me out personally? I have only one vote. I can do nothing singly. If my conduct is wrong blame the board who gave the instructions. But I will tell you, Sir, the reason why I am singled out. I am a churchman and a clergyman and what is more in your eyes.... I am a Conservative. The board in re-electing me vice-chairman, have sufficiently endorsed the fact that at the board I am not a partyman. I have no politics or religious leanings when I enter the boardroom. I am simply a guardian of the poor as the law directs me.... I relieve as a guardian not a clergyman.'

The Ashton Reporter replies, 'We are sorry that Mr Radley refuses to allude to the remarks which, as he says, we ourselves have made respecting his conduct at the meetings of the Board of Guardians. That we have "for the last month singled him out from the rest of the guardians for the lion's share of abuse," that we have misrepresented him and libelled him in our leader columns, is simply and purely false. The last time we had anything to say about the board or Mr Radley was on the 7th May, and then it was in reference to Mr Rowntree's visit to the workhouse. Mr Radley was incidentally alluded to in our remarks but in so harmless a manner that only the most "thin skinned" could possibly take exception to it. We have simply given publicity to the letters of Richard Pilling and other working men who consider that the conduct of Mr. Radley has been peculiarly harsh and inconsistent. We believe that it is as much our duty to give publicity to a letter of Richard Pilling's, so long as he writes respectfully, as to publish a speech of the Rev. Thomas Radley's. But it is simply absurd to say that the deep feeling abroad has been engendered or created by the letters which have appeared in our columns. Mr. Radley has only himself to thank for this feeling. If he were only joking when he made use of certain ill-advised expressions at the guardians' meetings, he should have taken an earlier opportunity of saying so.... But one object of Mr Radley's letter is too apparent to be misunderstood. He desires to make political capital out of it by the very audacious assertion that he is singled out because he is a Churchman, a clergyman and a Conservative. Mr Radley knows that this is simply "bosh;" but he must think that it will curry favour with many who do not understand the nature of the present dispute.

### **25th June 1864, Usk Observer**

'This borough is at present in a state of great confusion, owing to an order of the poor-law guardians directing that the men working on the roads and in the oakum shop shall work seven hours a day, for five days in the week, instead of seven hours a day, as they have done heretofore....

On the Thursday evening when the men were paid their weekly allowance the two hours which they had refused to work was stopped out of the sum usually given....





Cotton Famine Relief Office. Photograph taken by W. Emmett.  
Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

On the same day the oakum pickers, and road men turned out, and followed by hundreds, went in a body from Ashton to Staleybridge [sic]. On going along the road they stopped opposite the residence of the Rev Thomas Radley, church minister, who has rendered himself somewhat obnoxious as a guardian, and who received an anonymous letter a few days ago threatening his life. Here they hooted and hissed, when the servants afraid of some violence began removing the furniture out of the front rooms. The mob then went on....

*So aggrieved was Thomas Radley by his increasingly poor reputation in the borough that his attacks against the local newspaper for its publication of letters detailing his heavy-handed activities as a Guardian eventually resulted in prosecution. Libel proceedings were instituted against the Ashton Reporter. Matters were settled out of court via a stay conditional upon the newspaper issuing an apology. It is difficult to feel sympathy towards a privileged and wealthy man who used his position to worsen the lot of the poor. Yet it is clear that, for the reverend, his standing in the community was of the utmost importance. The exchange*

*is a fascinating early glimpse into the freedom of the press.*

### **26th November 1864, Ashton Reporter**

On Saturday, May 28th, and on June 8th, of the present year, we printed and published letters in our columns, signed "A Ratepayer and a Sufferer from the present Crisis," and "Richard Pilling," containing statements reflecting discredit on the character and clerical status of the Rev. Thomas Radley. We are sorry that those statements have caused Mr. Radley to feel himself aggrieved, and induced him to institute proceedings against us for libel. Mr Radley has stayed proceedings against us on our making the above apology, and we regret having been made the medium of libellous statements.

### **21st November 1868, Ashton Reporter**

I [Oldham Whittaker] have not the eloquence, nor the command of language, or the power of sarcasm that the Rev Thomas Radley has....

## **Scandal**

*Thomas Radley did not shy away from controversy. Having spent many years campaigning on behalf of the Conservative Party and, as a result, having become very well-known in society, in 1869 he caused an uproar when he was accused of betraying his close friend and political mentor, Oldham Whittaker. The two even exchanged bitter letters in the local newspaper where Thomas Radley claimed that his former companion had 'stabbed him in the dark.' The dispute arose following a meeting held between Oldham Whittaker and the Bishop of Manchester, during which the former alerted the minister to his concerns over Thomas Radley's behavior whilst curate at St. John the Evangelist, thereby derailing his ecclesiastical career. Following pleas from the Rev. Radley asking for forgiveness as to his unspecified sin, Mr. Whittaker had agreed to contact the bishop again and intercede on his behalf, requesting leniency in his case.*

### **17th April 1869, Ashton Reporter**

He [Hugh Mason] did say.... If there was one man more than another who had pursued him bitterly, implacably, unrelentlessly, unscrupulously, falsely, that man was the Rev. Thomas Radley, Clerk in Orders.— They had experience of that man in the

borough of Ashton-under-Lyne. He blushed for that man, because he could not blush for himself.... He held up to public gaze the slanderer of his best benefactor. It was but a few years ago since that man [Thomas Radley] came almost on his bended knees to supplicate the clemency of Mr. Oldham Whittaker. He could not have forgotten the time when he had interceded with his bishop. He begged of Mr. Whittaker in words of the most touching kind. As Mr. Whittaker would expect mercy he implored him to show him mercy, and he said... that never till his dying day would he forget the great service he had experienced at the hands of Mr. Oldham Whittaker.... Mr. Thomas Radley, after 15 years' living in this neighbourhood, had gained a good social position by the help of Mr. Oldham Whittaker, and through his interest and favour alone; and he then got up at every meeting of the Tory party, and persecuted him as if he had been one of his greatest enemies instead of his best friend.... When they saw men like Mr. Thomas Radley consigning to political perdition men like Mr. Oldham Whittaker, he (Mr. Mason) was not the man to shirk from uttering his sentiments. Such was the man who plotted and conspired on behalf of Toryism in Ashton-under-Lyne.

**24th April 1869, Ashton Reporter**

LETTERS FROM THOMAS RADLEY  
TO OLDHAM WHITTAKER Hurst,  
Monday Evening

Dear Sir, – I take the liberty of addressing you because my position is such that unless some kind hand be stretched forth, I shall be placed in most untoward circumstances. I have acted indiscreetly – I have done what may shake the confidence of those who expected better things – and my unguarded moments may blight the hopes which those who know me have fondly raised. Youth, energy, and talent opened out to me a field of extensive usefulness. My education and mental training, aided by the severity of study, have moulded my mind for literary pursuits; the habit of reading I have acquired, and the reading by which my mind is stocked, have fitted me for taking a prominent position in the battle for truth... yet all this will be rendered abortive, if at this critical period of my public life, one cannot be found to restore the fallen, or to exercise that lenient grace.... It may, and justly, be replied, the fault is your own;” a truth none can feel so



Oldham Whittaker. Taken from Parry's 'History of Hurst.'  
Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

bitterly as myself. It is a bitter – bitter reflection: may it be a lesson of wisdom, though taught by dearly-bought experience. Yet is it not a case to be relieved by the kindly sympathy of a Christian heart...? I am young and impulsive, but, thank God, I have not yet learned to call evil good, and good evil. Why, then, may you not endeavor to help me to that position where the restraints are greatest, and the temptations least? If I leave this diocese I may find great difficulty in securing another sphere of duty – and my active mind could not stagnate – my thoughts must go forth; but the legitimate outlet with its wholesome restraint would not exist – and thus my ability for good might render me more powerful for harm. What I would ask you, in the name of that mercy in which we all must trust, is, to support by your influence my application to the Bishop, that he may permit me to remain in his diocese, under some grave and learned parish priest. I am willing to be under any surveillance, and to undergo any probation; if I then fail, let

me be rejected. Though I may have forfeited your confidence ... by doing so you will confer a lasting benefit on one who will ever remember the kindness of him who, in a needful and trying hour, held forth a hand to help. I remain, sir,  
yours faithfully,  
(Signed) THOMAS RADLEY.

P.S. – I shall not be at home this week, so that if you wish to see me, or to return an answer, the former part of next week would be most convenient.

Hurst, February 1st, 1854.

Dear Sir,— .... I thank you for having preserved me from a position which might have induced me to a line of action, discreditable to my intellectual and social position and detrimental to those who have known me in better times. I sincerely hope that the career of my future life may be such that you may look back with feelings of intense gratification on the very Christian course you have throughout pursued.— I remain, dear sir, yours faithfully,  
(Signed) THOMAS RADLEY.

**24th April 1869, Ashton Reporter**

THE REV. THOMAS RADLEY AND MR. OLDHAM WHITTAKER

To the Editor of the Reporter. Sir, – I [Oldham Whittaker] do not deny, and have never denied, that at the time to which he [Thomas Radley] refers I had communications with the Bishop respecting the character of Mr. Radley, and his conduct whilst officiating as curate of St. John's Church, Hurst, and I assert now, that... I should have been a traitor to morality, a traitor to religion, and a traitor to the church itself, if I had looked quietly on and allowed him to be ordained a minister of the gospel at that time. Mr. Radley further alleges "that on the following week I went to the Bishop to undo what I had done." I did nothing of the kind. I went to the Bishop in compliance with Mr. Radley's request, as made to me in his first letter, to ask him to give the latter a further trial, and to look upon the case as leniently as he could. The second letter will tell with what result, and if Mr. Radley had then reformed, he might have redeemed his character, and attained the position to which he so aspired. That he did not do so was his own fault, and he has no one to blame but himself for his "enforced clerical laziness."

Mr. Radley states that he has only spoken of me in my political capacity. I fearlessly assert that he has constantly endeavoured to hold me up to the scorn and contempt of the public, and that his language on this last occasion even, far exceeds the bounds of fair legitimate discussion....

**1st May 1869, Ashton Reporter**

THE REV. T. RADLEY'S REPLY  
TO MR. OLDHAM WHITTAKER,  
To the Editor of the Reporter.

Sir,— Mr. Oldham Whittaker, inadvertently no doubt, forgot to send you a copy of the following letter written to him three years after the two letters which he has so kindly has published without my consent.... I should not have sent you the following letter without his consent... but as it only simply illustrates how untrue his assertion is "that I have constantly endeavoured to hold him up to the scorn and contempt of the public," I publish it without his consent.... In the fellowship of grief for the loss of their daughter, I wrote to them the following letter:

Sheffield, May, 1857.

The Unerring One saw in the garden of your heart a beautiful flower, and that it might bloom with eternal youth, he wished it near his throne.... And Death led her gently by the hand, and ushered her into the presence of the Father of Life.... Sorrow and sighing are now forgotten, and joy, ecstatic joy fills her soul.... Your flower in the spring time of youth is transplanted to the paradise of God, where it is for ever shielded from the chilly air and colder blasts of this weary world, to draw life for ever from the genial beams of the Sun of Righteousness.... She may not come to you, but you may go to her. Our Father, thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Amen.  
THOMAS RADLEY.

This letter, written three years after Mr. Oldham Whittaker had stabbed me in the dark and done me an injustice which he had never remedied – he tried to remedy it and failed; for that I thanked him in the second letter he published – this letter, I say, is proof sufficiently strong that I had not only forgotten him, but had forgiven him also, I will ask your readers if it breathes the spirit of rancor and hostility by which he says that I am influenced. One word more. Mr. Oldham Whittaker may,



in the devilish spirit which breathes through the closing sentences of his letter, make it a “bitter end” to those under his control who differ from him, but there will also be a “bitter end” to him. His grinding tyranny and pitiless oppression will make his Liberalism to stink in the nostrils of every honest Radical, and all will exclaim, “To live under a Tory landlord is paradise, but to starve and vote under a Radical mill-owner is worse than purgatory.” THOMAS RADLEY.

*Thomas Radley died at the relatively early age of 50 years on January 25th, 1879. The newspaper report suggests seizures, but it is not exactly clear what caused his death. His funeral was held at St. Peter’s Church in Ashton-under-Lyne.*

Offices held included:

Ashton Union Poor Law Guardian from 1862  
Magistrate of the Borough of Ashton and Cheshire  
Chaplain to the 23rd Lancashire Volunteers  
A Freemason ‘high and distinguished amongst that old craft’  
Hon Secretary to the Church Institute and Conservative Club ‘always ready with advice and money to advance the cause of constitutional liberty’  
Active promoter in the movement to provide a park for Ashton, and regular attendee at park committee meetings  
Member of the Loyal Order of Orangemen  
Member of the School Board Manager of the new parish schools

**1st February 1878, Ashton Reporter**  
‘In all these offices he did his duty well....’



St. Peter’s Church. Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

## **Randal Ridgway (1798-1878): Poor Law Guardian**

Randal Ridgway was born on June 1st, 1798, in the Cheshire village of Mottram, now situated in Tameside. His father was Robert Ridgway, a grocer in nearby Hollingworth for nearly fifty years. The Ridgway family resided on Roe Cross and were historically influential in the Stalybridge cotton industry for which Randal’s uncle Ignatius Ridgway, a talented mechanical engineer, constructed some early machines. Other members of the family were employed as craftsmen such as wheelwrights, carpenters and machinists. Against this background, it is not surprising that, by 1828, Randal had left the village in pursuit of greater things.

Having moved to Stalybridge, he gained employment as a hand spinner at Messrs Wagstaffe and Sidebottoms. In 1836 the partnership was dissolved, and he became manager, cashier and salesman for John Wagstaffe at the town’s Aqueduct Mills, with full control of the premises. He held this post for forty years and only retired when the enterprise was taken over by a Limited Liability Company. He had wide-ranging interests as evidenced by these extracts from local newspapers.

**15th December 1815, Manchester Mercury**  
Annual Meeting of the Manchester Philanthropic Society 15th December, 1815  
Trustees– Mr Randal Ridgway....

**10th March 1826, Manchester Guardian**  
A meeting of the committee appointed to carry into effect the resolutions of the general meeting for the relief of the necessitous poor, the following gentlemen be appointed collectors in their respective districts- District 7.... Randle Ridgway

**15th December 1827, Manchester Courier**  
Annual Meeting of the Manchester Philanthropic Society 12th December, 1827  
Trustees– Randal Ridgway....

*Randal Ridgway was a member of the Congregational Church and held very conservative views on religion. In politics he was always a ‘consistent Liberal.’ He entered into the public life of Stalybridge and held various public positions including police commissioner, town councillor, Poor Law*

*Guardian and justice of the peace. He is listed as vice-president of Stalybridge Liberal Association in 1867. 'He gave to all public questions in which he took an interest a calm and impartial judgement.'*

#### **12th April 1848, Manchester Courier**

Police Commissioners meeting, Stalybridge – the following gentlemen.... Randle Ridgway and John Ridgway to assist the clerk with drawing up a petition for a bill for promoting public health, which would be taken to Charles Hindley M.P. once completed.



1894 Lancashire CV11 Ordnance Survey Map showing Aquaduct Mills. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

#### **14th August 1852, Huddersfield Chronicle**

Commissioners' Meeting – The August monthly meeting of the Commissioners of Police took place in the committee-room of the Town Hall, on Thursday evening, the 5th instant. Mr Moses Hadfield in the chair. Messrs.... Randall Ridgway was also present. Messrs Randall Ridgway.... along with the law clerk, were appointed a committee.

#### **9th May 1857, Manchester Courier**

Municipal Election – The first election under the Charter of Incorporation took place on Friday, last week. The borough is divided into three wards.... The following gentlemen were elected Staley Ward – Messrs Randal Ridgway, Manufacturer....

#### **7th November 1863, Ashton Reporter**

PRESENTATION TO THE REV. T.W. RIDLEY.— On Tuesday evening last week an interesting event took place at the residence of Randal Ridgway, Esq., Hollins Villa. It will be in the recollection of our readers that about last June a farewell tea party was given to the Rev. T.W. Ridley, of the Methodist New Connexion Chapel, Grosvenor Square, previous to his departure.... In connection with that event an address was read expressing the deep feelings of the members of the congregation for their respected pastor.

Since that time Mr. Ridgway generously paid for the address being handsomely engrossed and highly embellished on vellum, and also beautifully framed in a gilt frame.

#### **6th July 1867, Ashton Reporter**

He is now fulfilling his duties as a justice of the peace for that borough he entered as a hand spinner, and he owes his position to his indefatigable energy and perseverance. His life and career in many respects stands out as an example to working men from whose ranks he takes pride in having raised himself.... It is seldom that so many members of a family attain to such trustworthy and beneficial positions as the Ridgways have done. Their positions have been honourably won by honest labour, great tact, persevering industry, and economical habits. They are a credit to the place that claims them as native born, and they are bright examples of what can be done by working men when they choose to employ their talents and energies in the right direction.

*Randal was very much a philanthropic, self-made man as demonstrated by the above tribute in the local newspaper. The Ridgway family were very well-respected in the area. By the 1870s Randal had moved into the sizeable Hollins Villa on Mostyn Street in Dukinfield, where he resided with his sister Eliza and grand-daughter Elizabeth. His neighbours were local construction magnate William Storrs and Methodist minister and reformer Joseph Rayner Stephens.*

#### **14th December 1878, Ashton Reporter**

Mr Ridgway lived a quiet and useful life, was temperate and regular in his habits, always at his post, and never allowed himself to be carried away by exciting events from the ordinary duties of everyday life. He was an industrious and faithful servant, and when full of years he retired into private life to enjoy the fruits of his industry in quietude; and he has ended his days with calmness and fortitude.

*In 1818, Randal Ridgway wed one Esther Lyne at St. Mary's Church, Stockport. Following her death, he remarried Elizabeth Ford in Ashton-under-Lyne in 1841. She sadly passed away seventeen years later. His first marriage resulted in a son, John, who soon followed in the footsteps of his father, obtaining a managerial position at the 'largest manufacturing establishment in Stalybridge.'*

He was held in high regard by the community: 'it is no flattery to say that as a specimen of a thoroughly practical working man he stands exceedingly high. His tact, ability, and judgement in matters of a public character are well-known, and he has deservedly won the esteem of a large number of his fellow-townsmen.'

### **Abel Buckley Wimpenny (1804-1869): Poor Law Guardian**

Abel Buckley Wimpenny was born on June 29th, 1804, in Holmfirth, Yorkshire to John Buckley Wimpenny and his wife Mary. He was baptised in the Congregational Lane Chapel at Upper Thong, a nearby village in the Holme Valley, on September 27th, 1804, and resided at Hogley, Almondsbury. In the late 1820s, he became the co-owner of Chapel Hill Mill, Dukinfield, which he owned in partnership with the Radical politician, and later Member of Parliament for Ashton-under-Lyne, Charles Hindley. with his wife and a second son also called Abel Buckley Wimpenny. This establishment, however, was listed in trade directories in his name alone and, by 1830, Mr Hindley was no longer his business partner and together William Swindells and Joel Gee served as his replacement. Three years later, they were employing 113 people in spinning cotton. This business arrangement was later brought to a close and, by 1834, Joel Gee had taken over, remaining at the mill for about 13 years.

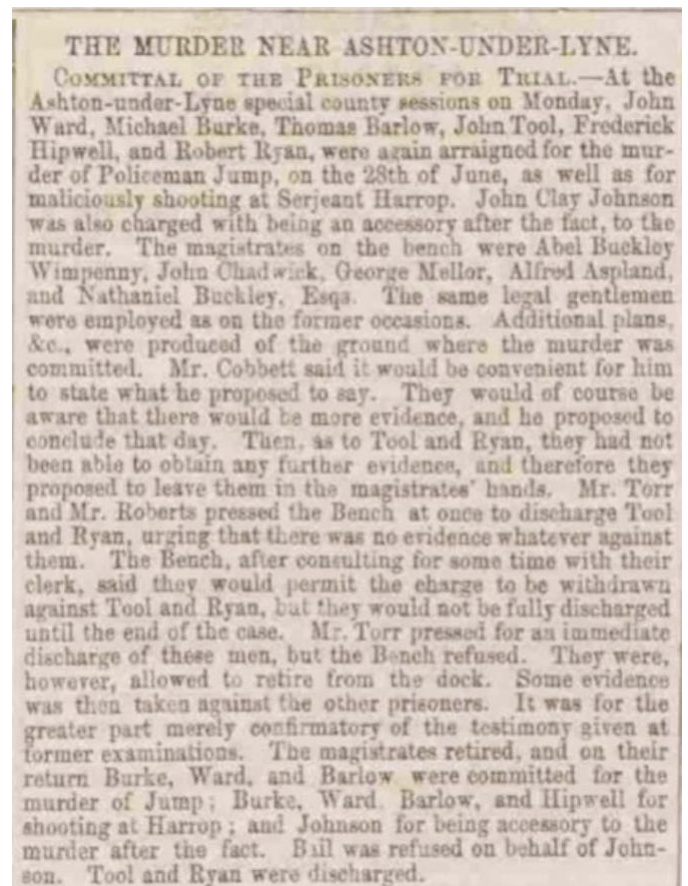
In the 1830s, Abel Buckley Wimpenny branched out into property, obtaining the freehold of several cottages in Hall Green, Dukinfield. He bought further houses in the 1840s, providing him with a very comfortable income. Marrying Margaret Irwin on December 21st, 1840, he is described in the 1841 census as a 'gentleman of independent means,' living on Old Road, Dukinfield. In 1847, he was appointed chairman of the Board of Guardians and also acted as a local magistrate. The Cheshire Electoral Register details his acquisition of an interest in some freehold cottages in Birkenhead. By 1851, as 'a proprietor of mills and houses,' he had moved to Manchester Road, Droylsden, where he lived with his wife, a son James, and two servants. By 1861, he had moved again with his wife and a second son also called Abel Buckley Wimpenny to Fairfield Square in the town's Moravian Settlement. At this point, he is registered on the census as a retired cotton spinner and magistrate.

### **5th October 1833, Manchester Times**

#### Legal Notice

We, the undersigned, do hereby give notice that the partnership connection heretofore subsisting between us as cotton spinners, and carried on at Dukinfield, in the county of Chester, under the firm of Wimpenny and Swindells, was dissolved and put an end to, on 23rd September 1833, by mutual consent – as witness our hands the first day of October 1833.

Abel Buckley Wimpenny  
William Swindells  
Joel Gee



The *Ashton Reporter* (5th August 1862) notes Abel Buckley Wimpenny's appointment as magistrate in the murder trial of Policeman Jump. Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

### **2nd August 1862, Christchurch Times**

At the Ashton-under-Lyne Special County Sessions on Monday Michael Burke, John Wars, Thomas Barlow, John Tool, Frederick Hipwell, and Robert Ryan were again arraigned for the murder of policeman Jump, on the 28th of June, as well as for maliciously shooting at Sergeant Harrop. The magistrates on the bench were Abel Buckley Wimpenny....



The 1862 murder of policeman Jump, attacked whilst attempting to arrest an armed gang at night near Ashton-under-Lyne, attracted nationwide attention. Abel Buckley Wimpenny served as one of the trial magistrates.

**7th March 1863, Ashton Reporter**

THE QUESTION OF EMIGRATION. MEETING OF WORKING MEN AT ASHTON Mr. Alfred Kershaw was the next speaker.... 'Were they to be dependent on the tender mercies of Abel Buckley Wimpenny and his colleagues, who offered the working men of England less than it took to keep the felons in our gaols! – (Cries of "Turn him off; he ought to live on it himself.")

*Just as Thomas Radley, Thomas Walton Mellor and other members of the Board of Guardians, Abel Buckley Wimpenny was singled out by both the local newspaper and campaigning working men during this period as being responsible for the seemingly punitive flavour of relief as administered by the Ashton Union. Alfred Kershaw, the Market and Lighting Inspector for Ashton-under-Lyne, was one such activist, frequently speaking at meetings and submitting letters to the Ashton Reporter on the subject of the hardship said to be suffered by many at the hands of the Board of Guardians.*

**11th September 1869, Ashton Reporter**

MELANCHOLY DEATH OF MR. WIMPENNY, J.P. We regret to have to announce the death of Mr. Abel Buckley Wimpenny, J.P., under the following melancholy circumstances. On Thursday morning he left Fairfield Station by the 9.22 train, to visit his daughter, Mrs. Armitage, who resides at Alderley Edge, in Cheshire. He was in his usual health, and was accompanied by several of his grandchildren. After spending the day with Mr. Armitage, he was accompanied to the station by that gentleman. He entered a first-class carriage, in which there were no other passengers. Nothing further is known of him until the train arrived at Wilmslow, between Alderley Edge and Stockport. A collector at the station opened the door of the carriage in which Mr. Wimpenny had entered, and was startled to find him seated on one of the cushions quite dead. No bruises were visible on any part of the body. When the unfortunate gentleman was found he was removed by the officials, and conveyed by the next train to Manchester. The coroner was made acquainted with the fact, and the body taken to Fairfield. Mr. Wimpenny was born in 1804, and was thus about 65 years of age. He has suffered from the heart disease for some time past, and it supposed that he died from that fatal complaint.

The image shows a handwritten document on lined paper. At the top left, there is a signature that appears to be 'William Wimpenny' and 'Sunderly Hill' followed by the number '66'. To the right of this, the date '1.5.10' is written. Below the date, there is a large, stylized signature that reads 'A. B. Wimpenny'. Underneath this signature, the word 'Chairman' is written in a cursive hand. The entire document is written in dark ink on aged, slightly yellowed paper.

The signature of Abel Buckley Wimpenny, as recorded in the Minutes of the Ashton Union Board of Guardians. Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives



He had sat longer as a county magistrate for the Ashton division than any other gentlemen who now fill the office of justice of the peace. For many years he was chairman of the Ashton Board of Guardians. The melancholy event has created a great sensation in Droylsden, where the deceased gentleman was well known and as well respected.

#### **14th September 1869, Ashton Reporter**

The Late Mr Wimpenny J.P.

The melancholy death of Mr Abel Buckley Wimpenny, J.P., under the circumstances detailed in our last issue, created a most painful impression in the minds of the community. The deceased gentleman was the oldest acting magistrate for the Ashton Division, having been appointed on 26th May 1851, Mr John Chadwick being the next. His appointment was dated 10th January 1853. For a very long time Mr Wimpenny was the chairman of the Ashton under Lyne Board of Guardians, a position which he resigned a few years ago, owing to his public duties having become so great that he could not attend to them, and devote that time to his own family he was so anxious to do. At the time of his death he was chairman of the Ashton division of county magistrates, to the duties of which he was very attentive, there was one peculiarity about him on the bench which has been several times noticed in the Reporter, and we allude to it

again, because it shows the importance he set upon the pleasures of a happy home.

Often when cases have been called upon in which a poor woman has suffered from a blow from her husband, given probably while in a state of intoxication, has he appealed to the wife and husband to retire from the court and endeavour to make up again. After an absence of a few minutes, she would return into court with the intelligence that she 'wished' to withdraw the case, as her husband had undertaken not to assault her again. At such times, Mr Wimpenny's face used to become radiant with joy, proceeding from an inward satisfaction that he had helped to make a home happier, and with some fatherly advice, he would urge the husband to keep sober, and the wife to be cautious about irritating her husband; he then urged them to return home and live comfortable together in the future....

*After his sudden death on September 9th, 1869, he was buried at St Mary's Church, Droylsden. In his will, he left effects of under £6000 to his son Abel Buckley Wimpenny of Oak Villa, Hayfield, the owner of the Hayfield Printing Company – a successful calico enterprise – and future member of the Board of Guardians for that town.*



Fairfield Square, Moravian Settlement – the site of Abel Wimpenny's residence in the 1860s. Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

# Masters and Matrons

*'The Offices of the Master and Matron of the Workhouse, though legally distinct and separate, are necessarily, in practice, so intimately connected that they cannot be well treated of separately.'*

## **Master and Matron of the Workhouse, William Golden Lumley (1869)**

Overseeing the workhouse and its occupants was the master or governor, an individual personally appointed by the Board of Guardians who was responsible for the day-to-day running of the establishment and its administration. The overall care of the inmates was in his charge. In order to meet the requirements of this position, the successful candidate had to be at least twenty-one years of age, possess the appropriate accounting skills and be of good character. Upon commencing his duties, it was obligatory for the master to provide a bond and two guarantors. In addition to the financial oversight essential to the post, he also superintended the purchasing of all supplies and the work of the residents. The master attended the meetings of the Board of Guardians in order to submit regular reports on the state of the workhouse. The office was held for life and only vacated following resignation or misconduct.

### **19th March 1846**

Mrs Ellen Hague the Matron of the Poor House having applied for an increase of salary beyond the present amount of £15 per annum and the committee having visited the Poor House as suggested by the resolution of the last meeting and found the same very clean and apparently well-regulated is of the opinion that her salary ought to be increased.

### **2nd July 1846**

The question of the amount of security to be given by the Master and Matron and contractors has been discussed. It was Resolved that the Master of the Workhouse enter into a bond with two sufficient sureties in the sum of £100 for the faithful discharge of the duties of himself and his wife, and that all contractors for clothing enter into a like bond, and all contractors for stationery enter into a bond in the sum of £30 for the due performance of their contracts.

### **9th July 1846**

Mr Brownson and Mrs Hague, Mr and Mrs Baker, Mr and Mrs Mottram and Mr and Mrs Gatty having been severally proposed for the situation of Master and Matron of the Workhouse the votes of the Guardians present were taken – the results being –  
2 Mr Brownson and Mrs Hague  
2 Mr and Mrs Gatty  
1 Mr and Mrs Mottram  
13 Mr and Mrs Baker

The latter were accordingly found to be duly elected.

### **20th August 1846**

In consequence of a letter from the Poor Law Commission dated the 17th Inst., desiring the Guardians to divide the salary of the Master and Matron and fix a separate salary for each as it is found that when a joint salary is assigned to a Master and Matron the arrangement is frequently productive of inconvenience.

It was Resolved that the salary of the Master be £45 per annum and that the Matron £25.

### **29th October 1846**

Mr John Baker appointed as Master of the Workhouse and his wife Mrs Mary Baker appointed as Matron.

### **4th May 1847, The Kentish & Surrey Mercury**

A bale of clothing containing 160 new garments, has been sent off from Lincoln, for the use of the destitute Irish.

## Masters and Matrons Employed at the Ashton Union Workhouse between 1819–1874

Date Appointed	Date Left Post	Master	Matron	Date of Resignation (if any)	Other Information
1819	Unknown	Mr John Ousey	Mrs Elizabeth Ousey		– Elizabeth Ousey died in post on the 13th September 1831
Unknown	September 1846		Ellen Hague		
October 1846	November 1847	Mr John Baker	Mrs Baker	November 1847	– Formerly employed at Ulverston Workhouse – Forced to resign after John Baker was found in bed intoxicated
November 1847	1858	Mr Jonathan Smith	Mrs Ann Smith		– Left to become district registrar
April 1858	December 1858	Mr John Harrison	Mrs Harrison	December 1858	– John Harrison was a former policeman – Previously master and matron at Hayfield Union workhouse – Master accused of elder abuse in October 1858 – Master and matron accused of neglect in November 1858 – Forced to resign due to financial impropriety
February 1859	1863	Mr James Wilkin Rattray	Mrs Mary Rattray	February 1863	– Came from Penrith Workhouse, Cumberland – Resigned to take up the same position at Birmingham Workhouse
1863	1871	Mr Peter Daley	Mrs Mary Daley		– Mary Daley passed away in 1871
1871	1874	Mr Peter Daley	Mrs Hall		– Peter Daley went on to Toxteth Park Workhouse

**10th December 1846**

An approved salary of £45 per Annum being assigned to the Master of the Workhouse, and £25 per Annum to the Matron with rations as proposed by the Guardians.

**1st November 1847**

Mr John Baker and his wife have tendered to the Guardians, their resignations of the Office of Workhouse Master and Matron, in consequence of a report made to the Board of Guardians by the Visiting Committee, alleging that the Master was, at the time of their visit, in bed owing to the effects of too free an indulgence in liquor.

Resolved that Mr Jonathan Smith and wife are hereby appointed Master and Matron at a salary of £80 per annum with board and rations.

**1st November 1847**

Letter to the Poor Law Commissioner Office, Somerset House

Sir, I am directed by the Poor Law Commissioners to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 21st, in which you transmit to them a copy of the minutes of the proceedings of the Board of Guardians of the Ashton under Lyne Union at their meeting held on that day, from which the Commissioners observe that Mr John Baker and his wife have tendered to the Guardians their resignations of the Office of Workhouse Master and Matron, in consequence of a report made to the Board of Guardians by the Visiting Committee, alleging that the Master was, at the time of their visit, in bed owing to the effects of too free an indulgence in liquor.

**11th November 1847**

Resolved that Mr Jonathan Smith and wife are hereby appointed Master and Matron at a salary of £80 per annum with board and rations.

**20th April 1850, Manchester Guardian**

The [workhouse] committee spoke in high terms of the conduct of the master and matron of the house (Mr and Mrs Smith), the master and matron of the workhouse hospital (Mr and Mrs Ellis).

**23rd October 1852, Manchester Guardian**

The Board of Guardians chairman proposed that the salary of Mr Smith the Master of the workhouse's salary should be increased from £80–£92 per year. This was unanimously accepted.

**22nd April 1854, Manchester Guardian**

At the weekly Board of Guardians meeting the minutes of the workhouse were read the committee paid a high eulogium to the master and matron of the workhouse, Mr and Mrs Smith, for their kindness to the paupers and their systematic manner of doing their business.

**8th May 1858, Ashton Standard**

Master of the Workhouse – The Guardians at the meeting on Thursday morning last appointed Mr John Harrison, Master of Hayfield Workhouse as Master of the Ashton Workhouse instead of Mr Jonathan Smith appointed Registrar.

**16th October 1858, Ashton Reporter**

MEETING OF THE GUARDIANS

Mr. A. HIBBERT then referred to the rumours so rife in the town respecting the alleged extraordinary manner in which the master of the workhouse treated the paupers. He had been questioned by various persons in reference thereto, and the opinion was strong that the matter should be inquired into.

**14th February 1861,  
Leamington Advertiser**

The famous Domesday Book of William the Conqueror is now at the Ordnance Map-Office, Southampton, for the purpose of being copied by the new process of photography.

**16th October 1858, Ashton Reporter**

ALLEGED MISCONDUCT OF THE  
MASTER OF THE WORKHOUSE

After the board had concluded its business, the Workhouse Committee, with other guardians interested in the inquiry, met in the board-room to investigate certain cases of alleged misconduct of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison, the master and matron of the workhouse....

The person from whose lips we received the following statement respecting the conduct of the master of the Union Workhouse is named Thomas Drinkwater, aged 80 years ... who left the establishment on Thursday week, having been discharged on that day with a weekly allowance of 2s. He states that on the 25th





Poor Law Union Offices, Ashton-under-Lyne, St Michael's Square. Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives



The Workhouse, Fountain Street, Ashton-under-Lyne. Circa 1910. Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

September he went to his club at Droylesden [sic], having been a member nearly 60 years. While there he had two gills of ale, and another on his arrival back at Ashton; this being all the liquor he had during the whole of the day. On his return to the workhouse at half-past six in the evening, the master charged him with being drunk, and ordered him to be locked up until seven o'clock the next morning. In order to increase the severity of the treatment, his shoes were pulled off, the fire was put out, and all the articles in his pockets were taken from him, including a pair of spectacles which he had not been able to recover; in addition to which the bed-clothes were carried away. At seven o'clock the next morning, the master sent down a man to him with orders to put him into a cold bath; but this humane servant had not the heart to enforce his superior's commands and at his own risk allowed Drinkwater to wash himself in the well.

The poor fellow here solemnly averred that rather than go into the house again, he would choose to suffer death. To give some idea of the malignant feeling which exists against the master, Drinkwater stated that it was fearful to listen to the horrid imprecations and oaths which fell from the lips of some of the inmates during the reading of prayers after meals. On Wednesday fortnight, the government inspector visited the establishment, when Drinkwater related to him the story of the treatment to which he had been subjected, and that gentleman, after having listened to his statements, said there was no cause whatever for the usage he had undergone.

On one occasion, an old man, trembling under the weight of years, having arrived at the age of 84, was smoking, when the matron of the house went up to him and threatened, if he did not desist, to break the pipe in his mouth, although smoking, in some cases, is allowed by the rules of the establishment.

In another case, Thomas Atkinson, a cripple, was unable to go into the dining-room at meal times; and, despite the poor man's helplessness, the master would not allow him to have any food, and he was from Thursday night until Saturday in a starving condition. But one of the inmates, a man whose heart sickened at the idea of such treatment, said he would not

be a party to allowing a man to die under such circumstances, and took Atkinson a quantity of porridge and milk, but in consequence of his exhausted state, from being without food so long, the poor sufferer could eat but very little when it was presented to him.

Drinkwater's case was then gone into....

CHAIRMAN: I understand this is not the first time he has returned to the house drunk.

MR. HARRISON: He has never come home sober during my term of office....

Mr. HARRISON then related what took place on the 27th September last. He had cautioned Drinkwater against returning to the house drunk, but in spite of this the old man made his appearance on this occasion and the porter charged him with being so, but he denied it. The porter then fetched Mr. Harrison who blamed Drinkwater for disobeying his orders. The old man then began to use most abusive language to him, such in fact as he could not repeat, and Mr. Harrison did what he could to get him away quietly; and failing to do so, he was at length obliged to order him to be locked up in the vagrant ward just as he was. In a while the porter came and told him that Drinkwater was kicking at the door, and he was afraid it would be broken through by him. Mr. Harrison then went, and cautioned the old man that if he did not desist he (Mr. Harrison) must take means to stop him.

After a time another message was sent that the kicking was being continued with greater vehemence than before, and the poker was also being used to break the door. They then went and took his clogs off his feet, the poker from his hand, and some articles out of his pockets, apples, &c., quite a hatful of things, and left him; but the fire was not put out, nor was anything done to him. As to putting him in a cold bath, he (Mr. Harrison) said nothing about the sort of bath to be used, but he did order him to be washed, to clear him of any filth he might have about his person. In answer to the chairman, Mr. Harrison said that he did not recollect anything about a pair of spectacles, except that Drinkwater had mentioned that he had lost a pair. There was no such article, to the best of his recollection, among the things taken from Drinkwater....

This concluded the first case.

The next charge, that of preventing an old person from smoking, was next touched upon; but as no name was mentioned, they could not meet an indefinite charge, and it could not be gone into.

Mr. HARRISON said it was the first time he had heard anything of it. It would be scarcely possible to make him believe that such an occurrence had taken place. The third and concluding charge was then brought forward.

Mr. HARRISON said there was no person in the house of the name of Atkinson. The only person to whom it seemed likely to refer was a man named Samuel Williamson, a cripple; but he was not aware that the man ever missed having his food.... Williamson was not in the house now. He ran away with the workhouse clothes on his person two months since, so that he could not be so helpless as asserted. He was also a very filthy fellow, and it was unbearable to be near him, he being in the habit of secreting about his person bits of fat meat and old rags, and he had to be continually watched and cleansed.

The CHAIRMAN now remarked that the charges having thus been examined into, there was not by any means sufficient ground for making them; and they must have emanated from a malevolent spirit.

**26th November 1846,  
Banbury Guardian**

Glasgow, we may now observe, is the largest city in the empire. The municipality of London has not more than a third of its extent or its population. The City of Westminster is not above half its size; and until the various burghs composing that huge metropolis are united into one Glasgow will remain the largest city, legally so called in Great Britain.

**30th October 1858, Ashton Reporter**  
Atkinson's Case.

.... the Chairman intimated that there had been a good deal said during the past week with respect to some statements made by a man named Atkinson, as to his being kept without food for two days, while in the workhouse. When the matter was brought before the guardians the other week, they were told by the governor that he knew of no such man, and that there was no one of that name in the house.

Mr. Dean said his attention had been called to the letter in the Reporter signed "R. Pilling," and if there was any truth in the statements therein made, it did seem to be one that called for a little attention ... it would appear that, seeing Atkinson was lame, Mr. Harrison told him he had better go into the hospital and be under the care of the doctor; and having given these directions, the governor thought no more of the matter. As regarded the man having been left without food, it appeared he had missed two meals, his breakfast and his dinner, simply because he would not send for them; he, however, sent for his supper, and had it. It was untrue that he had been without food for two days. In answer to Mr. Stead, the Chairman said it was the duty of the governor to look after every person in the place; and he ought to have seen that his orders with respect to Atkinson's going into the hospital were carried out.

Mr. Bradbury: He ought to see every pauper every day.

Mr. Hibbert: Should not Mr. Harrison know when a pauper is without food?

The Chairman said that in certain cases he should; but that the hospital patients were not to the same extent as the rest under his authority. Mr. Stott said that the governor had no right to lose sight of Atkinson, even if he had ordered him into the hospital.

This appeared to be the opinion of the guardians present. – Mr. Hibbert suggested the desirability of having Atkinson before the board.

The Chairman said he did not like, nor would the board like such charges as these to arise; it was contrary to the wishes of the guardians, he was sure, that any person for whom they had to provide should be ill-treated in any way; and it could not be denied that they were responsible

for the acts of their servants. The charge before them now was a rather serious one, and he had been questioned respecting it times innumerable; the board, therefore, would only be doing right in getting at the truth, by having both parties before them and bringing out all the facts of the case....

Some remarks were now made on the fact of Mr. Harrison's having applied for another situation as governor at Salford, and having been absent from the house without asking leave from the committee, which was considered to be discourteous on his part.

Mr. Dean said Mr. Harrison had been rather unfortunate in various matters, which might have arisen from the fact that whilst at Hayfield he had been governor, committee, and factotum combined; and had, consequently, managed matters pretty much as he chose.

The Chairman wishes that the public should quite understand that the board simply wished the paupers to be treated as well as they could be consistently.

#### **6th November 1858, Ashton Reporter** **ATKINSON'S CASE.**

After the usual formal business had been duly despatched, it was decided, in conformity with a resolution passed at the previous meeting, that the man Atkinson, who had caused a statement to be published in the Reporter, to the effect that he had been deprived of food for two days, and subjected to other ill treatment, whilst an inmate of the workhouse, should be called in and examined.... He was asked by the Chairman (Mr. Wimpenny) whether he had any particular wish, in making known his complaints to them, to have any one with him... and he was requested at once to state truthfully his grievances.

Atkinson then said that he had been in the workhouse for ten weeks, and that on two occasions he had been put into cold baths, when his right leg was inflamed and swollen by rheumatism ... He went to Mr. Wood, surgeon, whilst in the house, and he ordered him to rub it and apply poultices to it. He went to the governor, Mr. Harrison, and to one of the assistants, Sarah Wild, for the necessary rags, but they refused to give him any. The governor told him that he must go into the hospital, but

he did not do so because he had no order ... The Chairman: If the governor told you to go into hospital, it was your duty to do, if you wanted any attention paying to your affliction. You disobeyed orders... But he complained about being in the day-room two days without any food. He was in the room from Thursday till Saturday without food. One of the inmates, an old man, took him some "porridge as cold as a flag," on the Saturday night, but he was so sick he could not eat it. He was put in the cold bath the second time, in about a fortnight after entering the workhouse. The reason of his being but in the first time was because it was the rule with all new comers; and the second time the governor said he was filthy.... Mr. Harrison was then called, and the Chairman addressing him, said he (Mr. Harrison) had distinctly told them last time that there was no man in the house of the name of Atkinson.

Mr. Harrison replied that he was not aware of any one bearing that name at the time, but a week later he had discovered the error, and had mentioned it to the committee. After the charges had been explained to him, he replied that an order to enter the hospital was not necessary at all, and he had witnesses present to prove that Atkinson was not without food for two days. None of the officials knew of these complaints until Atkinson had left the house. Being told that he must have known about Atkinson's complaints, he replied that he did, and had very kindly suggested his going into the hospital, well knowing that he would not get that attention paid to him in the dining-room which he ought to have. As to the baths, the facts of the case were these: Atkinson continually sat by the fire, from the time of his entering the house, and it came to his knowledge that the flannel, &c., he wore was in a very filthy condition. He informed the matron and the kitchen servant, and the result was that he was ordered to be cleansed, but he never gave directions that he should be put in a cold bath.... The Chairman considered it extremely strange that a man suffering from rheumatism should have been offered a cold bath.

Mr. Harrison said he was not aware when Atkinson entered that he was sick, or he should have sent him into the hospital at once....

Faulkner, one of the inmates of the workhouse, and who is employed to carry food into the



day-room to such as cannot enter the dining-room, was then called, but his imbecile appearance at once convinced the guardians that he would be incapable of giving any credible evidence, and after putting a few simple questions to him, in the answering of which he stated that Atkinson had been without two meals one day, he was directed to leave the room.

Two other witnesses, old men, from the workhouse, were afterwards briefly examined, but they could only say that Atkinson had been without breakfast and dinner on one day; and as they could not fix upon the precise day, their evidence could not be taken.... The Chairman said that having had a distinct order from the governor, it was the duty of Atkinson to enter the hospital, and that it was his own fault he had suffered as he had done, and he had therefore no reason to complain.

Atkinson, in reply to a question, said he went to bed on his hands and knees; and it was therefore suggested that he could have reached the kitchen in the same manner.... The Chairman then observed that he could not see there was any evidence at all against Mr. Harrison. Atkinson had set out a report that he was without food for two days, but it seemed to him that if it were so it was entirely his own fault. There was, however, a possibility, one which ought not by any means to exist, that such a case might occur, and he therefore suggested to the governor either to inspect the day-room himself, or appoint a person on whom he could rely...

If he found a man afflicted with rheumatism, it was his duty to send him into the hospital, where his rations would be managed by a surgeon. He was astonished that he had not been sent into the hospital, for a rheumatic subject especially, and if Mr. Harrison did not know his ailment, it required greater care on his part in ordering him to be cleansed. There appeared to be a want of system or order in the governor's procedure, which did not exist in other houses. There seemed to be something hap-hazard about it, which ought not to be; and he was certain there were systems of managing a house where irregularities like those mentioned in the inquiry could not occur. He would remind Mr. Harrison that there was always a degree

of kindness to be used towards the inmates, such as was exercised by Mr. Smith, the late governor, but of course with a due regard to insubordination. There was a rational discretion to be used, for it was impossible for the manager of a workhouse to lay down any rules. The guardians wanted a man with discretion and a head-piece. They did not wish to be dragged before the public week after week in the manner they had been of late, as it had never been done before; but as far as Mr. Harrison was concerned in this case he was not to blame, as the man had an express order to go into the hospital.

Atkinson was again brought in, and the Chairman thus addressed him: I do not know whether you have been the means of publishing the charges in the papers we have recently seen. We have seen it paraded to the public that the workhouse authorities kept your food from you for two days; but we all believe it was entirely your own fault if such did occur. You acknowledge yourself that you had an order to go to the hospital which you did not act upon. There is nothing more despicable than to represent to the public as grave charges that which occurred entirely through your own fault, and your motives, therefore, do not deserve respect.

Atkinson: I do not know that I have done anything wrong. I never complained to the committee who come to the workhouse every week. I was only in ten weeks, and did not know the rules. – It was then Moved by Mr. Dean, Seconded by Mr. Stead, and unanimously Resolved, "That in the opinion of the board there is no ground for the complaint preferred by Atkinson, as, according to his own statements, he was instructed to go into the hospital, which he failed to do."

### **27th November 1858, Ashton Reporter**

Sarah Wild, the workhouse servant, had tendered her resignation, having obtained another situation in the neighbourhood. Mr. HIBBERT asked if there was any other reason why Sarah Wild was leaving.

The CHAIRMAN replied that she complained of her work being greatly increased since Mr. and Mrs. Smith; and her wages having recently been raised £2 per annum, the committee did not think proper to recommend

another rise. She had said that Mr. and Mrs. Harrison did not take the same active part in the management of the house as their predecessors, and there was consequently much more labour thrown on her shoulders. Mrs. Harrison was and had been out of health for the last six weeks, and did not leave her room till the day was pretty far advanced.

**22nd September 1866,  
Buckingham Advertiser**

A letter from Switzerland says that the ascent of the Frohnalpstock, 7,092 feet, was accomplished a few days back by a little girl barely six years of age, in company with her grandfather.

**14th December 1858, Liverpool Mercury**

The workhouse committee of the Ashton-under-Lyne Guardians having recommended Mr. Harrison, the Governor of the workhouse, to tender his resignation, having discovered that his books were not satisfactory in connection with a quantity of beef, amounting to 87 lbs, which had been received at the house, 34lbs of which was not accounted for, and Mr Harrison not having tendered his resignation, it has been decided to send the report to the Poor Law Board.

**ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE UNION.**  
**MASTER AND MATRON.**—Notice is Hereby Given, that the Board of Guardians of the Ashton-under-Lyne Union will, at their meeting to be held on Thursday, the 20th day of January next, proceed to the Appointment of a MASTER and MATRON of the WORKHOUSE. The Guardians would prefer a married couple, without incumbrance, who had filled similar offices, and it is essential that the Master be fully competent to keep the accounts and books in the form prescribed by the Poor Law Board. Salary £100 per annum, with apartments and rations.—Candidates must send their applications, in their own handwriting, accompanied by testimonials of recent date, stating age and present occupation, addressed to the clerk, on or before Thursday, the 13th January next. The applicants who may be required to attend personally on the day of election will be written to for that purpose. Canvassing, either personally or otherwise, is strictly prohibited, and will be regarded as a disqualification. The parties appointed will be required to enter upon the duties as early as practicable, and the Master will have to give a bond, with two sufficient sureties, or from a Guarantee Association, in the sum of £100, for the due discharge of the duties of the office.—By order.  
**JOSH. HIGGINBOTTOM, Clerk.**  
 Ashton-under-Lyne, Dec. 23rd, 1858.

Advertisement in the Ashton Reporter for a master and matron to manage the workhouse. Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

**24th December 1858, Ashton Reporter**

The public outcry against the mismanagement of the Ashton Union Workhouse ... that has led to the resignation of the master and matron has been warmly taken up by some of the guardians. At the meeting held by the board yesterday (Thursday), Mr A.B. Wimpenny in the chair, the following report was read from the workhouse committee.—Your committee in accordance with the resolution passed on Thursday last by the board, proceeded to the workhouse, and after a protracted interview with the master, an arrangement was made that he should remain upon the premises until the following Saturday, on condition that he tendered his resignation of his own office as master.

**24th December 1858, Ashton Reporter**

**ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE UNION, MASTER AND MATRON.**— Notice is Hereby Given, that the Board of Guardians of the Ashton-under-Lyne Union will at their meeting to be held on Tuesday, the 20th day of January next, proceed to the Appointment of a MASTER and MATRON of the WORKHOUSE. The Guardians would prefer a married couple, without incumbrance, who had filled similar offices, and it is essential that the master be fully competent to keep the accounts and books in the form prescribed by the Poor Law Board. Salary, £100 per annum, with apartments and rations.— Candidates must send their applications, in their own handwriting, accompanied by testimonials of recent date, stating age and present occupation, addressed to the clerk, on or before Tuesday, the 13th of January next. The applicant who may be required to attend personally on the day of election will be written to for that purpose. Canvassing, either personally or otherwise is strictly prohibited, and will be regarded as a disqualification. The parties appointed will be required to enter upon the duties as early as practicable, and the master will have to give a bond, with two sufficient sureties, or from a Guarantee Association,\* in the sum of £100, for the due discharge of the duties of the office.—By order.

**JOSH HIGGINBOTTOM, Clerk Ashton-Under-Lyne Union, Dec 23rd, 1858**

**29th January 1859, Ashton Reporter**

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GUARDIANS. Mr. Dean stated what transpired at the last interview of the House Committee with Mr. Harrison on the day of his leaving. He considered as he was leaving without notice that he was entitled to a month's salary; but he left the matter in the hands of the committee, who wished the board to give its opinion.

Mr. Bradbury said there could not be two opinions in the matter, and that he was not entitled to anything of the sort.

Mr. Harrison said by the man's resigning the matter was settled at once.

Mr. Newton thought it rather hard to make him pay the surcharge and stop his wage.

**5th March 1859, Ashton Reporter**

The Chairman said there was some degree of insubordination in the house, and the Workhouse Committee were determined to support the new master, and give him what sanction and encouragement they could; not to exercise any undue authority and cruelty, but to maintain his position. He wanted the inmates to know their duty and to follow it.

**9th April 1859, Ashton Reporter**

The Poor Law Board had sanctioned a payment of £2 2 shillings a week to Mr and Mrs Smith for their temporary services at the workhouse some little time ago; They also sanctioned the appointment of Mr and Mrs Rattray as master and matron of the workhouse at £60 per annum for the former and £40 for the latter.

**16th February 1863**

A letter was received from Mr and Mrs Jonathan Rattray tendering their resignation of the offices of Master and Matron of the workhouse having been appointed to similar situations at the Birmingham Workhouse and It was Moved by the Chairman and Seconded by Mr Bradbury and unanimously Resolved that in accepting the resignation of Mr and Mrs Rattray, the Board desire to express their entire satisfaction with the way in which their respective duties have been discharged during the whole of the time they have held their present situations and the guardians very much regret the loss of their services.

*The 1861 census shows that both James and Mary Rattray were employed in the workhouse, the former having been born in 1828 in Greystoke, Penrith and the latter in 1823 in Lancaster.*

**21st February 1863, Ashton Reporter**

The Clerk read the following letter relative to the resignation of Mr and Mrs Rattray: Ashton Union Workhouse, February 12th, 1863 Dear Sir – It is with considerable regret that we have to inform you, and through you the board, that in consequence of our appointment as master and matron of Birmingham Workhouse, we are under the necessity of resigning our appointments here at the expiration of one month from the above date. We would have much preferred a longer notice, but when we inform you that that large establishment has been without the control of a master since the death of the late one, you will easily understand that the guardians are desirous to obtain our services as soon as possible.

**2nd October 1858, Yorkshire Gazette**

**THE COMET.—**

On the 2nd of June last Dr. Donati, of Florence, discovered a small nebulous star. A few observations determined the character of the stranger to be that of a comet. These observations were not only sufficient to demonstrate the presence of a new comet, but also to make a fair approximation to the path of the wanderer. The comet grows in brightness, it follows very nearly its approximate path, as calculated from a few of its observed positions, till it becomes a marked and remarkable object to the naked eye, and now on every clear night is beheld with wonder and pleasure by thousands. Comparatively few of the present generation have seen such an astronomical phenomenon.

Allow us to express to the guardians our sincere thanks for the uniform kindness which they have shown us during the four years we have served them, which has in great measure, been the means of securing for us the important appointment referred to above, and that too, over the heads of two other couples (as candidates selected) representing establishments more than double the size of this, their respective capacities being 1,180 and 1,250 inmates. At the same time, we wish to express to our fellow officers, and yourself in particular, the high esteem in which we hold you and them, and the feelings of regret which must necessarily steal over us in contemplating so early a severance of that connection which has been marked by so much harmony and mutual goodwill – We are dear Sir, yours sincerely JW Rattray, Mary Rattray

### **2nd March 1863**

Resolved that the Clerk be instructed to advertise in the Manchester Guardian and Examiner and the two local papers for candidates to supply the vacancy, the appointments to take place on Monday.

### **7th March 1863, Ashton Reporter**

#### THE OFFICE OF MASTER AND MATRON

The Chairman said the committee appointed to consider the applications for the situation of master and matron of the Union Workhouse met on Wednesday, and out of 46 applications they found ten that had held similar appointments previously. There were many applications from respectable parties in their respective spheres, but he thought it was essential that someone should be elected who was already acquainted with the routine and duties.

Many unions had increased the salary of their officers before they would consent to part with them, and other applicants had not had time to make their intentions known to the guardians. He therefore asked that the appointment might be postponed until next Monday.

### **9th March 1863**

The Special Committee appointed to examine the applications for the situations of Master and Matron selected the following as the most eligible candidates and has requested their attendance at the Board

Mr and Mrs Daley:

Master and Matron Barton upon Irwell Union

Mr and Mrs Greenwood:

Master and Matron Congleton Union Mr and

Mrs Whyatt:

Master and Matron Hayfield Union

Mr and Mrs Eland:

Master and Matron Hemsworth Union

Mr Whyatt intimated that his wife had been taken ill on Saturday and he was wishful to withdraw his application. Testimonials of each of the above were submitted to the meeting and each was separately called in.

The votes were then taken without the candidates being proposed to the meeting and on the first ballot, there were ten votes for Mr and Mrs Daley and eight for Mr and Mrs Greenwood and It was Resolved that Mr and Mrs Daley be hereby appointed Master and Matron of the Union Workhouse at a joint salary of £129 per annum.

### **16th March 1863**

A letter was read from Mr Rattray, Workhouse Master requesting the Board to make some allowance for extraordinary services rendered by himself and his wife in the discharge of duties as Master and Matron during the last two years. After a little conversation upon the subject, It was Moved by Mr Bradbury, Seconded by Mr Slater and Resolved that the application be not entertained.

### **26th June 1863**

A letter was read from a Mr Isaac Summers of Stamford Street, Ashton under Lyne complaining that Mr James Knowles, one of the Assistant Relief Officers has been attending to other business than that he is being paid for by the Guardians. It was Agreed to refer the matter to the Outdoor Relief Committee for investigation.

### **18th July 1868**

Mr and Mrs Daley intimated to the Board their intention to apply for the offices of Master and Matron of the Toxteth Park Workhouse and requested a testimonial from this Board to support them in their application and It was unanimously Resolved that the Chairman be authorised to sign a testimonial on behalf of the Board expressive of the entire satisfaction of the Board with Mr and Mrs Daley's past services.



THE  
**GOVERNOR'S GUIDE;**  
A  
**Manual for Masters of Union Workhouses:**  
CONTAINING THE  
REGULATIONS AT PRESENT IN FORCE RELATING TO  
THE IN-DOOR RELIEF OF THE POOR,  
AND TO THE  
**APPOINTMENT, QUALIFICATIONS, DUTIES, REMUNERATION,**  
AND  
**SUPERANNUATION**  
OF  
MASTERS OF UNION WORKHOUSES IN ENGLAND & WALES;  
TOGETHER WITH  
SUCH PORTIONS OF THE POOR LAW BOARD'S  
**NEW ORDER OF ACCOUNTS**  
AS AFFECT THE MASTER.  
WITH  
AN APPENDIX AND A COPIOUS INDEX.

BY  
NUGENT CHARLES WALSH, Esq.,  
BARRISTER-AT-LAW,  
*Author of*  
"THE MEDICAL OFFICER'S VADE MECUM."

LONDON:  
NICHOLLS BROTHERS,  
Printers & Publishers of the Books and Forms of the Poor Law  
Board, Charity Commissioners, &c. &c.  
FREDERICK STREET, GRAY'S INN ROAD, W.C.

1867.

# Workhouse Staff

The master and matron were supported by only a small number of full-time staff, relying instead upon pauper labour provided by inmates. In order to secure appropriate employees, advertisements were placed in local newspapers. Prospective applicants were interviewed and appointed by the Board of Guardians before being ratified by the Poor Law Commissioners. On occasion, a candidate would be rejected by the latter and the process would recommence. Once in post, the employees of the workhouse would be expected to ensure that the inmates adhered to the regimented daily routine through ministering to their medical, religious and administrative needs, all the while fostering the ethos of self-sufficiency. Such individuals occupied live-in positions.

Residents of the workhouse who found themselves unwell would be seen by the **medical officer**. As this post was put out to tender and therefore filled by the applicant demanding the lowest salary, the hired practitioner would often be inexperienced and of poor ability. He was initially supported in this work by unskilled female inmates posing as de facto nurses. In the 1850s, growing pressure for the reform of medical care resulted in the construction of hospital facilities separate from the workhouse proper. Florence Nightingale's own campaigning in this regard, championing better training of nursing staff, also occasioned some improvements. The following decade saw practitioners who had benefitted from proper medical instruction enter the workhouse.

A number of ancillary officials complemented the above managerial and medical positions:

A **chaplain** from a local church was appointed to minister to the moral and religious lives of the inmates of the workhouse. He would read prayers and sermons to the latter every Sunday and on Christian festival days. He would also visit those inmates who were sick to offer spiritual consolation.

The **porter's** role was to support the master in maintaining discipline in the house and to take on responsibility for security, locking

the outer doors of the workhouse and handing the keys to the master for safekeeping. Management of the admission book, a record of the names of each pauper entering and leaving the workhouse, also fell within his remit.

The **relieving officer's** main duties were to deal with applications for poor relief. Each prospective claimant had to be interviewed and his/her circumstances determined. In urgent cases, he was authorised to give orders of admission to the workhouse. He also administered the out-relief allowances and kept accounts for submission to the auditor.

The **workhouse teacher** oversaw the education of all the pauper children, providing at least three hours of instruction each weekday in reading, writing and arithmetic, together with a grounding in Christian religion. The teacher also accompanied the children if they left the workhouse and played a role, as all staff did, in administration and discipline. This post was available to male and female applicants.

## ***28th October 1848, Woolmer's Exeter & Plymouth Gazette***

RAILWAY TRANSIT.— The number of passengers who travelled by rail during the past half-year, 26,330,492, comprehends a railway ride for every man, woman and child in England, Scotland and Ireland. It is calculated that, within the next five years there will be upwards of 10,000 miles of railway open in Great Britain, which will give permanent employment, at good wages, to upwards of 140,000 persons, representing about 700,000 of the gross population...

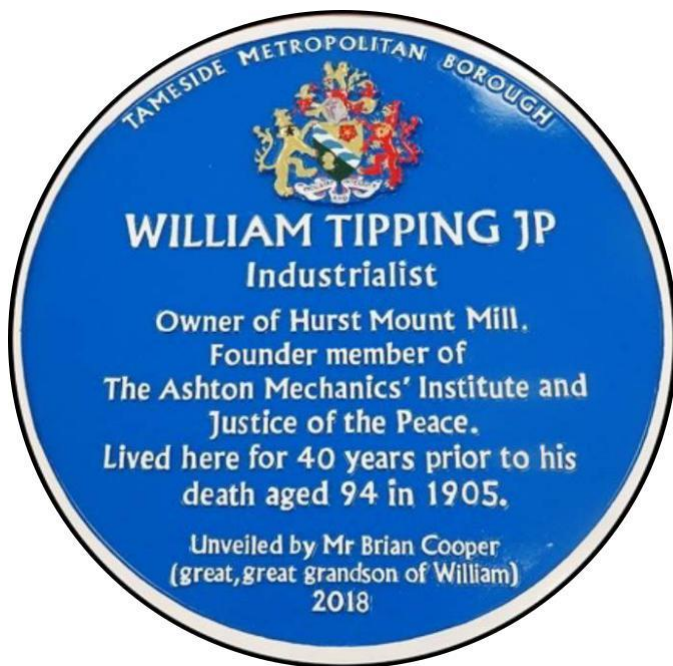
Lastly, several specific posts attached to the Unions themselves took charge of administrative matters affecting the Guardians:

The **treasurer** was responsible for receiving and paying out all monies concerning the Guardians, whilst ensuring that the accounts were balanced.

The **clerk to the Board of Guardians** recorded all the meetings of this body in the form of minutes, in addition to dealing with correspondence, account books and reports. He was also responsible for organising the annual elections of Guardians.

## Joseph Tipping: First Relieving Officer for the Ashton Union

Joseph Tipping was born to Mary and William Tipping of Ashton-under-Lyne and was baptised in the parish on May 22nd 1814. He was the brother of William Tipping J.P., who was the owner of Hurst Mount Mill and founder of The Ashton Mechanics' Institute. His blue plaque can be seen on Albemarle Terrace.



Blue Plaque on Albemarle Terrace remembering William Tipping. Credit: Graces Guide

Joseph married sixteen-year-old Kitty Dyson on November 20th 1836 in Middleton, Manchester, citing his occupation as book-keeper. They settled in his home town of Ashton and had one child, William, in 1838.

By 1841 the family were living in Market Street and both Joseph and his wife were employed in the cotton industry. According to the census ten years later, Joseph Tipping had moved again to

Henrietta Street and is listed as Relieving Officer for the Ashton Union Workhouse. He left this post in 1851 after six years of service. In 1861 his circumstances had again changed, as Joseph's occupation is there termed a 'salesman of cotton goods' and the family had relocated for a third time to Croft Cottage on Mill Lane. After a further move, the Tipping family resided with Joseph's sister-in-law and nephew. His employment remained the same. Not long afterwards, he suffered a personal blow when his wife Kitty died. Indeed, in 1881, he is described as a sixty-six-year-old widower, still living with relatives, but named on the census as a 'gentleman.' He died in 1899 in Ashton-under-Lyne.

### 27th November 1845

Resolved that medical officers be paid at the rate of seven shillings for each patient, 10 shillings for midwifery cases and that in addition to the above payments the medical officers shall be entitled to such fees as are fixed by a General Medical order of the commissioners bearing date the 12th March 1842.

Medical Officers appointed for twelve months from the 5th December:

Mr Francis C Mallalieu of Fairfield – Audenshaw division

Mr James Massey of Denton for the Denton and Haughton Township

Mr Luke Evans of Stalybridge for Hartshead division

Mr Charles Anderton of Stalybridge for Staley including Tintwistle and Micklehurst

Mr William Cluley of Ashton-under-Lyne for Dukinfield

Mr Samuel Beer of Hyde for Newton, Godley and Matley

Mr Henry L Pomfret of Hollingworth for Hollingworth, Mottram, Hattersley and Tintwistle (except Micklehurst)

Mr Samuel D Lees of Ashton-under-Lyne for North side of Old St, Ashton-under-Lyne and

Hamlets of Hurst, Smallshaw and West side of Oldham Rd

Mr Frederick Cook of Ashton-under-Lyne for South side of Old St, Ashton-under-Lyne and The Poorhouse

**12th March 1846**

The Board recommend that the Clerk's salary be increased from £150 per Annum to £160.

**25th March 1847**

A letter dated 18th March 1847 from Mr Wood was read out, stating that Elizabeth Wilkinson had suffered a severe attack of epilepsy and her appointment as nurse at the Workhouse was cancelled. An advertisement was to be issued in the Manchester newspapers to appoint a nurse to attend the sick at the Workhouse at a salary of £10 per annum.

**20th January 1848**

Resolved that according to the recommendation of the workhouse committee Jane Turner be appointed nurse at the workhouse, that she be paid £10 per annum with board and rations and that she be required to give one months' notice previous to resigning the situation.

**5th January 1859,  
Eddowe's Shrewsbury Journal**

The incumbent of a populous district in Bristol announced to his congregation on Sunday morning last, that upon a further consideration of the prophecies of Daniel, he had arrived at the conclusion that the world would shortly come to an end.

**28th June 1851, Manchester Guardian**

.... Mr Mellor then rose and said he thought the board could not allow Mr Joseph Tipping, whose time was out that day, to leave without paying some token of respect to that gentleman. He had great pleasure in moving the following resolution:—

'As Mr Tipping's duties of relieving officer for No 1 District in this union terminate today, this board cannot do otherwise than record their high opinion of his public worth, having always found him of strict integrity, plodding, practical, and preserving, and attending to all the requirements of his office; just in his administration of relief, honest in all his transactions, carefully correct in representing the condition and circumstances of all applicants, and quick in detecting attempted imposition. Mr Tipping's services, since the formation of the union in October, 1845, have been held in the highest approbation by those who have formed the relief committees; few, if any, deceived; their labours have been materially lessened by the correctness of, and their confidence in, his representations.' The resolution was passed unanimously.

**Slater's Lancashire Directory 1855:**

Ashton Poor Law Union Workhouse Staff  
Governor – Jonathan Smith  
Matron – Ann Smith  
Treasurer – Jonathan Ross Coulthart Esq.  
Surgeon – Robert Wood  
(also of Warrington Street)  
Schoolmistress – Sarah Kinch  
Relieving Officer – George Pierce  
30th October 1856

A conversation has taken place relative to the appointment of a schoolmistress for the workhouse in place of Mr Finch and it was resolved that the clerk is instructed to write to Mr Browne, the School Inspector and inform him that Mr Finch has intimated his intention of leaving his present situation at the close of the present year and the Board are anxious to appoint in his stead a teacher with such a certificate as will entitle her to the whole of her salary from the government grant. The Guardians will be glad to have his opinion and advice as to the best course to adopt in making the fresh appointment.

**11th December 1856**

The Chairman stated that he had repeatedly heard of complaints being made by parties who had been in the hospital, of the treatment they received from the pauper nurses there and strongly deprecated the principle of employing pauper nurses in the hospital at all



# EXTRACTS

FROM THE

## DIARY OF A WORKHOUSE CHAPLAIN.

BY THE

REV. D. L. COUSINS, A.M.

“The short and simple Annals of the Poor.”

GRAY.

LONDON:

J. HATCHARD AND SON, 187, PICCADILLY ;  
CHILCOTT, BRISTOL ; LOVESEY, CHELTENHAM ;  
CHILD, WORCESTER: ELDER & CO.,  
EDINBURGH.

1847.

– a conversation ensued afterwards and the Relieving Officer was questioned in reference to the matter but as there were no particular case or cases before the meeting, the matter was dropped.

### **18th December 1856**

A circular letter was read from the Poor Law Board respecting the residence in this workhouse of children of workhouse officers and stating to the Board some of the objections which they ascertain to such arrangements and requesting the Guardians when they appoint those Officers, to intimate clearly to any successful candidate who may have a child dependent on them, that such a child will not be permitted to reside in the workhouse.

### **2nd April 1858**

The following letter from the Poor Law Board was received to confirm the appointment of Mrs Sarah Kinch as matron of the Goole Union Workhouse who previously held the position of Schoolmistress at the Ashton under Lyne Workhouse.

*Sarah Kinch is shown on the 1851 census as the workhouse schoolmistress. Hailing from Byley, Chester, she was 37 years old and a widow.*

### **6th November 1863**

A letter was read from Mr Browne, recommending a Miss Crabtree (formerly of Kirkdale Industrial Schools) to the notice of the Guardians as a suitable person for the office of Schoolmistress at the workhouse – a letter was also received from Miss Crabtree applying for the position and referring the board to a testimonial she had requested Mr Hagger, late Headmaster of Kirklands Industrial Schools to forward, but Mr Hagger's letter has not arrived. It was Agreed to defer making any arrangement in the matter until the next meeting.

### **20th November 1863**

Resolved that Miss Sarah Emma Crabtree is hereby appointed Workhouse Schoolmistress at a salary of £20 per annum with board and rations.

### **19th March 1864, Ashton Reporter**

ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE UNION.— WANTED, an Active, Middle-aged, SINGLE MAN, or WIDOWER without incumbrance, as Nurse at the Workhouse Hospital. Salary £20 per annum, with Board and Lodgings. The nature of the duties may be known on application to Mr. Daley, Master of the Workhouse. Application, in the candidate's own handwriting, stating age and previous occupation, accompanied by recent testimonials, to be left at these offices by 12 a.m. on Monday, the 28th instant, and intimation will be given to those candidates whose attendance may be required on the day of election.

By order,

BENJN. SEYMOUR, Clerk.

Union Offices, Ashton-under-Lyne, 17th March, 1864.

### **30th April 1864, Ashton Reporter**

THE WORKHOUSE PORTER.

Mr. Mullen, the porter at the workhouse, applied some time ago for an increase of salary, in consequence of being called upon to assist the governor in keeping his books. At that time it was agreed he should have one guinea extra for the quarter. He now applied to have the advance continued, and after a little discussion the board agreed to it for another quarter.

### **18th August 1864**

Another letter was read from the Poor Law Board sanctioning the appointment of Mr William Haslam as the Workhouse Porter at a salary of £20 per annum with apartments and rations.

### **19th January 1865**

A letter was received and read assenting to the appointment of Ann Willett, Hospital Nurse at a salary of £20 per annum.

The Clerk submitted the return asked for at the last meeting of the number of ordinary and difficult midwifery cases in each Medical District during each quarter of the past year distinguishing the ordinary and difficult cases.

### **26th October 1865**

The Workhouse Master reported the death of Edward Bradbury, Hospital Nurse and.... It was Resolved that the clerk be instructed to advertise in the two local papers and one in

**16th May 1857, The Paisley Herald and Renfrewshire Advertiser**

STUPENDOUS EXPLOSION OF GRANITE.— Last week, in one of the quarries at Maen, in the parish, of Constantine, Falmouth, belonging to Messrs William and John Freeman, by a charge of powder 93lbs a mass of granite was shot out four feet from its original position. It measured 53 feet in length, 30 feet wide, and 21 feet deep, the solid contents being 30, 160 feet. This, at the computation of 14 feet to the ton, gives an aggregate weight of 2726 tons. Besides this enormous dislodgement, large pieces of advance rocks were split up. The quality is very superior, and what is generally termed “rough grit.”

each of the three Manchester papers for a suitable person to supply the vacancy at a salary of £20 per annum with board and lodgings. Applications to be sent for examination by the Workhouse Committee on Monday 6th and the appointment to take place on the 9th November inst.

**9th November 1865**

The Board looked into consideration the three applications for the situation of hospital nurse selected by the Workhouse Committee and It was Moved by Rev. Lomax, Seconded by Mr Slater and unanimously Resolved that H. Moorhouse be hereby appointed Hospital Nurse with a salary of £20 per annum with the usual rations and lodgings.

**7th December 1865**

A letter was received from the Poor Law Board reminding the Guardians that the salary of the late Hospital Nurse was only £15 a year whilst the salary of the newly appointed nurse is £20 per annum, and requested to be informed of the grounds in which the proposed increase is recommended by the Guardians. It was Resolved that the clerk be instructed to state in reply that the salary in question had previously been £20 per annum and the Guardians cannot get an efficient nurse for less, and the reason Bradbury, the late nurse, had only £15 a year was in consequence of his being an inmate at the time of his appointment and the Guardians considered that amount sufficient under the circumstances.

**17th May 1866**

A letter was read from Mr Rowen Medical Officer of No 2 District proposing Charles A Harvey of Denton, Physician and Surgeon as his substitute during illness or unavoidable

absence and the nomination was considered satisfactory to the Board.

**4th April 1867**

Resolved that Mr Samuel Beecroft, Surgeon and Apothecary is hereby appointed Medical Officer for the Townships of Godley and Hattersley, Matley and Newton being No 7 District for 12 months at a salary of £25.

**5th April 1859,  
The Western Flying Post, Yeovil**

**DRINKING FOUNTAINS.—**

The first drinking fountain erected in London is now nearly completed.

It is situated at the north-eastern corner of Snow-hill, in the wall of St. Sepulchre's churchyard. The work is composed of columns and sill in polished red granite, with an alcove of white marble, the whole being enclosed within an arch, which gives depth and importance to the design.

This fountain—as well as others which are intended to be erected at the front of the Royal Exchange, in the Regent's-circus, and other localities in the metropolis—are to be completed through the sole and generous munificence of Mr. Gurney, of Lombard-street ....

### **19th December 1867**

A letter was read from Mr Haslam, the Workhouse Porter, tendering the resignation of his office in consequence of his having obtained another situation and It was Resolved that the resignation be accepted and that the clerk be instructed to express to Mr Haslam the satisfaction his services have always given to the Guardians and they are pleased to learn that he has succeeded in obtaining an engagement that promises considerably to improve his position.

A conversation then ensued on a suggestion by Mr Daley that a married couple should be advertised for and It was Resolved that the clerk be instructed to advertise in the Ashton Reporter, the Ashton Guardian and the North Cheshire Herald for a middle-aged married couple without family – the man to fill the situation of Porter and Assistant Bookkeeper at the Workhouse and the woman to take charge of the Imbecile and Idiotic Patients in the Hospital, at the joint salary of £30 per annum, the application to be sent in by 12 o'clock at noon on Monday the 30th instant.

### **21st December 1867, Ashton Reporter**

Ashton-under-Lyne Union.

WORKHOUSE PORTER AND NURSE WANTED.– The Guardians of the Ashton-under-Lyne Union are desirous of receiving applications from a middle-aged married couple without family – the man to fill the situation of Porter and Assistant Bookkeeper at the Workhouse, and the woman to take charge of the imbecile and idiotic patients in the hospital. The nature of the duties may be known on application at the Workhouse, and the persons elected will be required to enter upon their duties as early as possible. The joint-salary will be £30 per annum with suitable rooms, board, washing, &c., in the house. Separate applications in the handwriting of each candidate, stating age and present occupation, and endorsed "Workhouse porter and nurse," should be sent, accompanied by testimonials, to my office not later than twelve o'clock at noon of Monday, the 30th instant; and intimation will be given to those candidates whose attendance may be required on the day of election.– By order, BENJN. SEYMOUR, Clerk,

Union Offices, Market Place, Ashton,  
19th Dec., 1867.

### **9th January 1868**

The Workhouse Committee reported that they had received 21 applications for the situation of Porter and Assistant Bookkeeper out of which they had selected 5 to attend the General Board. The candidates were severally called into the room after which It was Moved by Mr Cooke and Seconded by Mr Pearson that Mr James Lawton be appointed to the office. Mr Hemingway Moved and Mr Garside Seconded that Mr Peter Hodginson have the appointment.

Mr Hartley Moved and Mr Cryer Seconded that Mr John Radcliffe be appointed to the office.

On the show of hands there were 2 votes for Radcliffe and 9 votes each for Hodginson and Lawton.

The votes were then taken as between Hodginson and Lawton when there were 10 votes for each candidate and the Chairman gave his casting vote in favour of Lawton who was declared to be duly elected.

Resolved that Mr James Lawton of Stalybridge be duly appointed Porter and Assistant Bookkeeper at the Workhouse at a salary of £20 per annum with the usual Board, Washing and Apartment in the House.

### **6th February 1868**

The Workhouse Master reported upon the present crowded state of the Hospital and the urgent necessity that existed for the immediate appointment of an additional female nurse – It was Resolved that the clerk be instructed to advertise in the 3 Ashton papers, and the North Cheshire Herald, for an unmarried middle-aged female for the office at a salary of £14 per annum with board and lodging, the candidate to attend personally at the Board Room on Thursday next at 11A.M.

### **13th February 1868**

The Workhouse Master also reported upon the death by fever of Mr Miles W Moorhouse the male nurse at the hospital and the intimation



**30th December 1859,  
The Lincoln, Rutland,  
and Stamford Mercury**

We understand that the War Office Committee appointed to consider the question of an uniform for the Volunteer Corps throughout the country, have recommended that the tunic should be of a brownish grey colour, and that the colour of the facings, and the shape and colour of the nether garments should be left to the taste of the several corps.

gave rise to a general expression of regret amongst the members of the Board at the loss of so useful an officer.

There were three applicants for the job of Assistant Nurse in the Female Department, each of whom appeared before the Board when It was Resolved that Frances Robinson aged 29 years of Edgecombe Villa, Dukinfield is hereby appointed Assistant Hospital Nurse at a salary of £14 per annum with Board and lodging.

Resolved that the clerk be instructed to advertise in the three Ashton papers, the Manchester Guardian and the North Cheshire Herald for a married couple without encumbrance between the ages of 25 and 40 years, as Nurses at the Hospital, at a joint salary of £34 per annum (being £20 for the Male and £14 for the Female), with Board and lodgings.

The Board took into consideration the applications for the situation of Hospital Nurses, but as only 3 couples appeared as candidates It was Agreed to defer the appointment until Thursday next at 10am.

**1st October 1868**

Mr and Mrs Naish, Hospital Nurses, tendered their resignation in consequence of having a situation at the Manchester Workhouse and It was Agreed that the resignation be accepted and that the clerk be instructed to advertise for another married couple on the same terms – the appointment to take place on the 15th inst.

**8th October 1868**

The Board then proceeded to the appointment of Workhouse Servant in place of Mrs Martha Archdale who has resigned. 4 suitable candidates appeared with testimonials – and after due consideration – It was Moved by Mr William Ogden and Seconded by Mr Brook and unanimously Resolved that Emma Pennington, aged 19 years, near Tarporley... is hereby appointed General Servant at the Workhouse at a salary of £16 per annum with the usual Board and Lodging.

ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE UNION.  
**W**ANTED. a respectable **UNMARRIED FEMALE**, between 25 and 40 years of age, as Nurse at the Workhouse Hospital; salary £16 per annum, with board and lodgings. The nature of the duties may be known on application to Mr. Daley, Workhouse Master. Candidates are desired to attend personally, with testimonials, at these Offices, on Thursday, the 28th January next, at ten o'clock a.m.—By Order, BENJN. SEYMOUR, Clerk.  
Union Offices, Market Place, Ashton,  
24th January, 1869.

Advertisement for a 'respectable unmarried nurse at the Workhouse Hospital,' as posted in the Ashton Reporter (16th January 1869). Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

**11th April 1869**

A letter was received from Mr Wood Workhouse Medical Officer stating that he has long felt that the salary for medical attendance to the Workhouse has been very inadequate considering that he is denied the extra allowance made to District Medical Officers for difficult Confinements, Fractures, Dislocations, Operations, and Vaccinations and in the course of a few days he hoped to be in a position to supply the Board with information from other Unions.

It was Agreed to defer the consideration of the application until the formation of the new Board and in the meantime Mr Wood would no doubt furnish the information to which he referred.

**27th May 1869**

The subject of Mr Wood's application for an advance of salary as Workhouse Medical or some extra allowance made for Fractures and Vaccination was again under consideration. Some discussion ensued when It was Moved by Mr Fletcher Seconded by Mr Garside and unanimously Resolved that Mr Wood's application be not entertained at present.

**22nd July 1869**

A letter was received from Sarah Ann Hadfield, Hospital Nurse expressing a desire to be appointed General Assistant to the Matron of the Workhouse as that situation is now vacant.

It was Resolved that the Clerk be instructed to advertise for another suitable unmarried female between 25 and 40 years of age as Hospital Nurse at the same salary as before, the appointment to take place on the 5th...

**2nd December 1869**

The Board then proceeded to the appointment of Nurse and Assistant to the Workhouse Matron.

Resolved unanimously that Catherine Steele of Liverpool aged 28 years ... is hereby appointed Hospital Nurse at a salary of £18 per annum, with the usual Board and Lodging.

Resolved unanimously that Harriet Clews of Sandbach aged 38 years, she is hereby appointed cook and general assistant to the Workhouse Matron at a salary of £18 per annum with Board, Washing and Lodging in the House.

**24th December 1859,  
The Leigh Chronicle**

Englishmen, accustomed to consider a single elephant a wonder, will, perhaps, be surprised to hear that, during 1857-8, 1,034 elephants were sent from Rangoon to Calcutta for the army.

# The Workhouse Diet

'Please, Sir, I want some more' from Charles Dickens's famous novel *Oliver Twist*, is a phrase synonymous with the image of the Victorian workhouse diet.

The scheme of meals served in a workhouse was known as the 'Dietary' and was adapted to suit particular types of inmates. The overriding principle of the workhouse diet was that it should not be better than that of the poorest labourer, although there was much debate regarding this assertion.

After the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, the Poor Law Commission issued six dietaries or weekly meal plans that could be adopted by individual workhouses. The meal plans were designed to be plain and repetitive, in accordance with the overall workhouse ethic. All the plans included a substantial amount of bread, gruel and cheese, with a varying amount of other foods such as potatoes and suet puddings. Meat was generally served twice a week. Some Unions were more generous with the supply of food, whilst others were harsh and punitive. The quality was often very poor. Although many workhouses grew their own fruit and vegetables, kept pigs and baked bread, most bought in their provisions through a series of contracts with local suppliers, with price rather than quality being the overriding consideration. As a result, workhouses were vulnerable to supplies being adulterated, such as the watering down of milk and the baking of bread from an inferior flour.

From the late 1840s, after a series of scandals concerning workhouse food, the Unions were able to choose their own dietary, subject to approval by the Poor Law Board. Unions could request changes, but this was a very long-winded process. Some improvements came in the 1860s as a result of a report by the medical officer of the above Board, Dr Edward Smith. His recommendations included the distribution to each pauper of a knife, fork and spoon at mealtimes, and the standardisation of recipes to avoid discrepancies between the different Unions.

The board stipulated that 'silence, order and decorum' at mealtimes should prevail and, in general, most meals were eaten in silence. Food could also not be taken away by a pauper to eat between meals. The latter were plain and boring - hot dishes were almost always boiled which made flavours very bland. Dishes were prepared under the supervision of the matron with pauper assistance.



Oliver asking for more, an engraving taken from *The Writings of Charles Dickens*, volume 4, drawn by George Cruikshank (1894). Credit: Wikipedia

**26th October 1867,  
The Dunfermline**

MR BROWNING, THE POET—  
Mr Robert Browning was on  
Saturday elected a fellow of  
Balliol College, Oxford.

### 9th July 1846

The clerk having advertised for tenders for the supplies for the Workhouse, the tenders and samples were examined by the committee appointed and their recommendations were accepted namely—  
Mr Bancroft: Grocers, Sugar, butter, clove pepper, treacle, mustard, candles and soap, 161 Stamford Street

Mr Joseph Bardsley: Brushes, Stamford Street

Mr John Andrews: Milk

Mr Cunningham: Stationery, 32 Stamford Street

Messrs Etchells and Cooke: Clothing and drapery, 33 & 35 Stamford Street

Mr John Miller: Coffins, Hurst

Mr James Keowns: Hats

Mr George Dalglish: Clogs, 166 Stamford Street

Mr James Horner: Flour and meal, 39 Old Street

Mr Robert Chambers: Rice, tea, coffee, arrowroot and soda, 149 Stamford Street

### 6th August 1846

A copy of the dietary submitted for the opinion of the Board of Guardians of Ashton under Lyne Union:

	Breakfast			Dinner							Supper						
	Oatmeal Porridge	Milk	Flour Bread	Cooked Meat	Potatoes	Broth from Boiled Meat	Pea Soup	Thick Boiled Rice and Milk	Suet Pudding	Treacle Sauce	Potato Hash	Buttermilk	Oat Bread	Bread	Cheese	Oatmeal	Milk
	lbs	pt	oz	oz	lbs	pt	pt	pt	lbs	gills	lbs	pt	oz	oz	oz	lbs	pt
Sunday	2	$\frac{3}{4}$		4	2	$\frac{3}{4}$								6	2		$\frac{1}{2}$
Monday	2	$\frac{3}{4}$	4					1 $\frac{1}{2}$					4			2	$\frac{3}{4}$
Tuesday	2	$\frac{3}{4}$					1 $\frac{1}{2}$									2	$\frac{3}{4}$
Wednesday	2	$\frac{3}{4}$			2							$\frac{3}{4}$		6	2		$\frac{1}{2}$
Thursday	2	$\frac{3}{4}$							2	$\frac{1}{2}$						2	$\frac{3}{4}$
Friday	2	$\frac{3}{4}$									2		2			2	$\frac{3}{4}$
Saturday	2	$\frac{3}{4}$	4					1 $\frac{1}{2}$								2	$\frac{3}{4}$

All inmates aged 60 and upwards to be allowed 4oz of bread and butter with coffee and tea in lieu of the breakfast and supper above prescribed.

The children to be fed, dieted and maintained with such food as the Guardians from time to time shall deem right to direct.



### **17th December 1846**

Dietary table for Workhouse same as last year but with further notes from the Poor Law Commissioners—

Guardians of the poor to allow infirm persons resident in the workhouse a sufficient quantity of tea or coffee for breakfast and supper, not exceeding 1 pint per meal, sweetened with an allowance of sugar, not exceeding an ounce to each pint of tea, together with an allowance of 4oz of bread and butter per meal, in lieu of porridge and milk for breakfast and cheese or porridge and milk for supper.

Children under the age of nine shall be fed, dieted and maintained with such food and in such manner as the said Guardians shall direct; and children of the age nine years but under the age of thirteen shall be allowed the same quantities as are prescribed in the table for women. And we do hereby further order and direct that the master of the workhouse shall cause two or more copies of this order, legibly written, or printed in a large type, to be hung up in the most public places...



Poor people having dinner in a workhouse, 1840.  
Credit: Wellcome Collection

### **23rd January 1847**

1. The quantity of suet pudding allowed at dinner on Thursdays is at least  $\frac{1}{2}$ lb too much, and as a proof of this we have found large pieces hidden in different places in the men's yard, not only so but have frequently observed that both men and women are unable to eat the quantity allowed.
2. The allowance of cooked potatoes is also too much as there are quantities left both at the men's and women's tables- independent of the quantities which are taken from the dishes and handed to men at the tables who have no bounds to their stomach and who will absolutely eat until they are ill.
3. The allowance of potato hash is fully  $\frac{1}{2}$ lb too much as quantities are left varying from  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  lb in many of the dishes.

I think it would be only right that Mr Austin should be informed that very shortly after I introduced the present Dietary, I discovered that the allowance at each meal was more than a match for the appetites of the inmates generally. At the same time I consider that it would be advisable to allow the system 3 or 4 weeks trial and having done so up to last Thursday, (and on the day the Workhouse Visiting Committee going through the dining hall at the time dinner was on the tables), expressed great surprise at the large quantity allowed to each person. As a matter of course, they asked me different questions about the meal.

I therefore told them that I considered our allowance was too much and that it would be advisable to make some little alterations in that respect when they desired me to express my opinion to the General Board on that subject.  
From John Baker

### **24th February 1849, Manchester Courier**

The workhouse committee recommended the use of haricot beans as an article of food, because they were better than potatoes, and only half the price.

### **28th September 1850, Manchester Guardian**

Mr Ellis master of the workhouse hospital complained to the Board of Guardians about the quality of bread supplied by Mr Horner.

*James Horner is listed in Slaters Trade Directory in 1843 as a flour dealer on Old Street, Ashton-under-Lyne.*

**2nd June 1855, Ashton Reporter**

Provisions consumed in the workhouse during the half year ending March:

Bread 25617 lbs; Flour 4474 lbs; Beef 6936 lbs; Suet 323 lbs; Potatoes 40691 lbs; Pork 176 lbs; Bacon 253 lbs; Cheese 904 lbs; Butter 1471 lbs; Oatmeal 14213 lbs; Sugar 1331 lbs; Milk 17652 quarts; .... Ale 256 pts; Porter 373 pts; Whiskey 9pts....

Total cost of provisions: £892 10s 10d

**5th February 1859,  
Maidstone Telegraph**

NEW PAPER MATERIAL.— Some highly interesting experiments in connection with the invention of a new material for paper, were exhibited on Tuesday by Mr. Houghton, the patentee, at Perkin's factory, London.

Mr. Houghton states that any wool, or vegetable fibrous matter, may be thus usefully converted, and proves the fact by showing the results of his process as applied to flax straw, flax refuse, and common wood shavings.

One of these substances, flax refuse, for example, is placed in a boiler, which communicates with a stove by means of pipes, and being subjected to the action of a strong alkaline solution, raised to a temperature of from 378 to 380 degrees Fahrenheit by the application of Perkins's system of hot water circulation, a pure linen pulp, free from silica and all extraneous and useless matter, is produced.

**13th December 1856, Ashton Reporter**

The guardians of the Ashton under Lyne Union will be prepared to receive tenders up to Thursday.... for the supply of the following articles to the workhouse of the said union for a period of three to six months, as may be decided by the guardians commencing 25th December and to be delivered as ordered: Probable quantities for the three months: Milk 8000 quarts, Flour 2400lbs, Bread 1400lbs, Meal 1700lbs.... N.B. payments of accounts monthly or quarterly to suit the contractor.

**18th December 1857**

Resolved that Mr John Slater have the contract for oatmeal at £1.13s.0d per load for 3 months; Mr William Manchester have the contract for bread at 6 ¾d per 4lb loaf for 3 months; and Mr John Ridgway have the contract of flour at £2.7s.0d per load for 3 months.

**26th February 1858**

Resolved that the clerk is instructed to acknowledge the receipt of the letter from the Poor Law Board which was read at the last meeting on the subject of the children's dietaries and to state that the Board is still of the opinion that there is no necessity for a fixed dietary for the workhouse children but consider it is a matter that is left to the discretion of the Guardians and therefore to allow the children a sufficiency without regard to any fixed amount as to quantity.

**26th June 1858, Ashton Reporter**

.... In speaking of contracts of provisions recently entered into, the Chairman said there wasn't a workhouse in England where the food supplied was of better quality, or, he ventured to say, equal to that supplied to this house. The bread particularly was of most excellent quality.

**23rd October 1858, Ashton Reporter**

Ashton Paupers' Rations:

**Monday** – Porridge and Skimmed milk twice a day; for dinner broth, potatoes and a little meat

**Tuesday** – Porridge and milk twice, dinner – pea soup and 6oz bread

**Wednesday** – Porridge and milk twice, dinner – stewed potatoes and a little meat

**Thursday** – Porridge and milk twice, dinner– suet pudding

**Friday, Saturday and Sunday** – same as Friday, except on Sunday night when each pauper is allowed 2oz cheese and 6oz bread, with some tea for supper, giving for the week 18oz bread and 1lb of fresh meat, except those of 60 years of age and upwards, who are certainly treated better than the rest.

### **26th December 1858, Ashton Reporter**

It was stated that large quantities of provisions were generously provided weekly by many of the wealthy inhabitants of Broadbottom, Tintwistle and Haughton to mitigate, to some extent, the privations of the unfortunate operatives whom the present stagnation in trade had beggared; and not the least noteworthy of these benevolent individuals were the Sidebottoms of Broadbottom. The Chairman observed, at the conclusion of the meeting, that the money which the board thought fit to give – if not supplemented by private benevolence – would scarcely keep body and soul together, and he was glad to hear of the kindness of those referred to.

**WORKHOUSE CONTRACTS.**

Gentlemen:—I see the Board of Guardians have advertised for the next six months' supply of provisions for the workhouse. They will require 30 loads of oatmeal and 15 sacks of flour. Now, in Salford they have recently advertised for 90 sacks of flour and 25 loads of oatmeal for the same period, thus showing that they take more interest in the health of their paupers than our guardians do; for it is a well-known fact that where there is so much porridge eating and low living there will of necessity be the itch. Why not change the dietary? Flour is as cheap as so much meal. Besides that, those under 60 years of age are short of eatables. That is the opinion of everyone that I talk with amongst both rich and poor, who all say that at least they ought to have more than 18oz. of bread per week. I wish the guardians to know that I am writing at the request of hundreds, and if something be not done to give our poor more food and better treatment than they have had, next March every district in this union shall be contested, and our motto shall be, "More food for our paupers, and better treatment both by our officials and others in power."—Yours,  
199, Fleet-st., Henry Square. RICHARD PILLING.

Extract from a letter by Richard Pilling on the subject of the workhouse diet to the *Ashton Reporter* (24<sup>th</sup> December 1858).  
Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

### **1st January 1859, Ashton Reporter**

The weekly report of the Workhouse Committee was next read, from which it appeared that the stock of bacon being found much less than was accounted for in the books, an inquiry had been made, when it was ascertained that a quantity had been spoiled in the curing, and what could not be eaten was given back to the pigs.

The following letter had been received from the Poor Law Board:—

Ashton-under-Lyne, December 15th 1858

My Lords and Gentlemen

In answer to your Lordship's letter of the 13th, instant... respecting the quantity of butchers' meat at the workhouse.... I beg further to state that we have for some time past been a little in advance with butchers' meat which arose as follows: We have been in the habit of occasionally killing a pig, fed at the workhouse, for the use of the establishment. When the first one was killed after my taking charge of this house as master, I made out at the time an order in the proper way, as in other cases required for procuring provisions, and intended making out a debtor and creditor account of it; but the committee refused to sign the orders, saying it had not been usual, and that on former occasions it was the practice here to kill the pig and cure it; and, as it was used, enter it in the invoice side of the day-book, up to the quantity that would amount to the original cost of the pig.

I obeyed that order notwithstanding it being my opinion at the time that the course was irregular, and under these circumstances the original cost of the pig was charged, at which time I had left a considerable quantity of bacon on hand; this of course was used up by degrees and in place of beef, which has caused us to have a little more of the latter in stock than appeared on the book, and could only be accounted for by showing less waste than was actually made....

With regard to the 34lb found in the corner of Sarah Wild's day-room, I beg to say that it is a small room immediately adjoining the provision store, and the beef in question was put there by a woman employed in the kitchen in the cooking department but not by any order from myself or the matron, she knowing that a little less beef had been consumed during the week than usual, she believed that it would be considered an offence if it was seen by the committee....

I promise that no such thing shall occur again.

I am, &c.,

JOB HARRISON

To the Poor Law Board, Whitehall.

### **15th January 1853, Manchester Times**

Remarkable egg – A pullet of last year's hatching, the property of Mr John Alcock, Tintwistle, have lately begun to lay. On the 4th inst., a hen produced an egg of the following dimensions, namely, 7 ½ inches long, and 6 inches in circumference, and weighing 3 ½ ozs.

#### **26th February 1859, Ashton Reporter**

On the minutes of the Workhouse Committee being read, Mr Dean remarked on the quantity of bread ordered for the ensuing week (1,300); they would be apt, he said, to wonder what became of it all if the inmates of the house had only 18oz each per week – when in fact, the average was 3lbs or 4lbs.

Mr Newton asked if the actual amount of bread served to each pauper could not be reported to the board...

The [dietary] table was then produced, framed and varnished by which the rations were served out; and it was handed round to many of the guardians.

The following is a statement of the dietary:–

#### **Breakfast**

Every day in the week men and women paupers 2lb oatmeal, oatmeal porridge and ¾ pint milk; men and women above 60, ¾ pint coffee and 6oz bread

#### **Dinner**

**Sunday** – 1½lb potato hash for men and 1¼lb for women

**Monday** – 4oz cooked meat, 1½lb potatoes and ¾ pint broth from boiled meat for men; and 4oz cooked meat, 1¼lb potatoes and ¾ pint broth for women

**Tuesday** – 6oz bread and 1½ pint pea soup for both men and women

**Wednesday** – 1½lb potato hash for men; and 1¼lb ditto for women

**Thursday** – 1½lb suet pudding and 1½ gill treacle sauce for men and 1¼lb pudding and 1¼lb suet pudding and 1½ gill treacle sauce for women

**Friday** – 4oz meat, 1½lb potatoes and ¾ pint broth for men, and 4oz meat, 1¼lb potatoes and ¾ pint broth for women

**Saturday** – 6oz bread and 1½ pint soup for both men and women

#### **Supper**

6oz bread, 2oz cheese for both men and women and ¾ pint of tea for those above 60 And throughout the rest of the week 2lb porridge, ¾ pint milk while men and women above 60 have ¾ pint of tea and 6oz bread. From the above, the board came to Mr Dean's conclusion that each pauper had upwards of 12oz of bread per week.

Mr Dean said:–

– there were about 150 persons in the house who had bread morning and evening, and tea and coffee instead of porridge; they had 6oz of bread each time.

– with respect to the outcry against oatmeal porridge, it was a fact that many of the old men exchanged their bread and coffee for porridge so well did they like them.

– there were upwards of 30 inmates under 60 years of age who were allowed tea and coffee and bread, because the doctor thought that diet more preferable for them than porridge. Mr Harrison showed that the master of the house must serve out the food accurately by the table, or his books would soon be wrong, and the auditor would discover the fact of anything going wrong.

#### **14th May 1859, Ashton Reporter**

A brief discussion took place with reference to the butter used in the workhouse not being contracted for amongst the other contracted articles sought by the guardians. It was understood that butter would not keep for that length of time for which the contracts extended, and the system was to allow Mr Rattray, the master of the workhouse to go round to the wholesale dealers in the town, obtain estimates and choose the butter himself. Mr Lees thought such a system was fraught with immense danger and suggested that a month's supply might be obtained to be purchased or contracted for by the guardians of that board. Mr Mellor could not see why it should not be included in the other contracts.



The chairman said he would contract for it at a slight disadvantage rather than carry on as at present. He would leave it with the Workhouse Committee and he thought they might make contracts for the supply of butter for three months.

**28th October 1859,  
The Durham Chronicle**

Mr Rudd, innkeeper, of Bowes, is in possession of a male cat of the following extraordinary size and weight:— It measures from the nose to the tip of the tail 2ft. 11 ½ in., and stands 12 ¾ inches high at the shoulder; its weight is 9 ¾ lbs.

**29th December 1860, Ashton Reporter**

Christmas Day at the Workhouse – In accordance with the excellent annual custom the inmates of our workhouse were treated on Christmas day to a most sumptuous repast of the good old English fare of roast beef and plum pudding, with a good draught of sparkling brown ale. The dining room was decorated in a chaste and elegant manner of evergreen, rosettes and tiny banners under the superintendence of the master Mr J.W. Rattray. The royal crown with initials VR on either side or festoons of evergreen strung simply yet chastely around it. It was far more gladdening to the heart to see the room filled with the poor inmates enjoying themselves once again. When all had eaten, one of the poor recipients rose energetically to propose a vote of thanks to the Board of Guardians, which received a spirited response and was followed by one heartily responded to – that of the health of Mr and Mrs Rattray, the kind Master and Matron.

**18th February 1860, Ashton Reporter**

At the weekly meeting of the Board of Guardians, Mr Dean wanted to know how it was that about 60lb more of bread had been used last week at the Workhouse than previous weeks, when there was the same number of inmates. Mr Rattray the Master of the Workhouse explained that sometimes there was an increase of inmates for one or two days only and they consume a quantity of bread.

Sometimes they run out of bread and an increase in the order for the next week is needed.

**3rd January 1863, Manchester Courier**

Ashton Board of Guardians – On Christmas Day, the inmates of the workhouse enjoyed the usual treat of roast beef and plum pudding, and other refreshments, and each of the boys and girls received 2d from a lady, and the babies, not to be overlooked, had sponge cake given to them by the same benevolent individual.

**11th June 1864, Ashton Reporter**

The beer used at the workhouse – Mr. Sandiford remarked that reference had been made to the beer etc. used at the workhouse. Dr Wood met him that morning and told him he should meet the workhouse committee at half-past two o'clock that afternoon, and lay a statement before them as to how it was consumed, which would no doubt be satisfactory.

Some conversation took place on the subject, the feeling of the board being that no explanation was necessary from Dr Wood, as he has been given orders for it to be used medicinally, and no one had any right to interfere with him in the discharge of his duty in that respect. The matter was left in the hands of the workhouse committee.

**30th August 1866**

Resolved that the clerk be instructed to advertise for tenders for supplying the workhouse with Provisions, Clothing and Butchers meat for three months and all other articles for three or six months as may be decided upon by the Guardians.

**3rd January 1867**

The Workhouse Master reported that during the past week Mrs W. Ogden of Stamford Street had presented the children with 120 oranges and 12lbs of nuts; Mr J.D. Smith of Chamber Hills with 16lbs of Ormskirk gingerbread; and Mrs William Morley of Victoria Street, Ashton with 500 buns and that those gifts and other little things that had been furnished by two other parties had enabled him to provide a tea party for all in the house on New Year's Day.

### 18th April 1867

Ordered that the total amount of invoices appearing in the Master's daybook.... be posted as following:

Provisions	G.H. Bancroft	Grocer	£5-11s-10d	
	James Brown	Potatoes	£8- 8s- 0d	
	John Wilton	Wine Merchant	£4- 1s- 0d	
	Henry and Robert Miller	Groceries	£10-3s-1d	
	Joshua Taylor	Corn Dealer	£24-10s-0d	
	John Hyde	Farmer	£6-6s-6d	
	William Morley	Baker	£15-18s-3d	
	Mr Coop	Butcher	£10-7s-5d	
	Necessaries	Lees and Booth	Coal	£4-0s-0d
		Clothing	Ann Lindley	Currier
Jane Ivy	Draper		£3-7s-4d	
Common charges	Thomas Oldham	Old Ropes	£12-5s-6d	
	Ann Lindley	Dubbing	£0-4s-9d	
	John Wilson	Ironmonger	£2-9s-0d	

### 24th December 1868

The Chairman stated that in consequence of the Circular from the Poor Law Board on the subject of the Workhouse diet which was read at the last meeting of the Board, the Workhouse Committee had agreed to recommend that a little Bread be substituted for a portion of Potatoes prescribed for Dinner on Tuesdays and Fridays and It was Resolved that the recommendation of the Committee be adopted ...

### 27th May 1869

A letter was read from the Poor Law Board in reference to the proposed changes in the Workhouse Dietary Tables suggesting certain alterations on the advice of Dr Smith. It was Agreed that the letter and the tables be referred to the Workhouse committee for consideration and report.



Members of the United Cooks' Society preparing a monster plum pudding at Marylebone Workhouse for the Lancashire Operatives. Credit: Wellcome Collection

# Children

Victorian society as a whole was sympathetic towards the treatment of children in the workhouse. There was an underlying feeling that although pauperism might afflict the young, a possibility of redemption for these fledgling souls nevertheless existed. Indeed, many believed that these children could become adults who contributed to society, and therefore no longer part of the Poor Law system. By the mid-nineteenth century, this demographic made up almost half of the nearly one hundred thousand workhouse occupants – the number diminished to some extent by the 1890s.

The illegitimate and those whose parents could no longer support them came to the workhouse for help. A number of leading reformers such as the educational campaigner James Kay-Shuttleworth, however, argued that the workhouse was not a suitable place for the young. Various schemes were introduced whereby children were boarded out, apprenticed or placed in cottage homes, but the majority still spent their formative years living in the workhouse. Until the age of seven children could live in the women's wards with their mother, but after that they were separated into the male and female quarters and only saw their parents on average once a week. Family separation was standard practice in the life of the workhouse. In addition, orphaned children were often legally placed in the care of the Board of Guardians. The latter would frequently assign boys and girls of the appropriate age to an apprenticeship governed by the terms of an indenture.

By the mid-nineteenth century the trend was to send at least some of the children to local schools, usually national or British, where unfortunately they were frequently stigmatised on account of their clothing and short hair. During this period, the Ashton Union still maintained a school in the workhouse, but there is evidence that some children were sent to institutions both within and outside the Ashton boundary.

## **10th February 1847, Manchester Guardian**

The question of sending orphan children to the Swinton Schools was next considered. The clerk read a letter from Mr Harrop, clerk to the Manchester Board, consenting to take them in the school, educate, board them for the sum of 3s 9d per head per week. 'The guardians agreed to a motion 'that the offer of the Manchester Board be accepted.' A question arose as to whether children deserted by their parents would be admitted into the Swinton schools. It was resolved that the clerk write to the Manchester Board, to ascertain that point.

*Swinton Industrial School was established by the Manchester Poor Law Union in the 1840s. It was designed to take 1500 children, including those from neighbouring Unions. The education there was reputedly of a high standard and aspired to teach pauper children a useful trade.*



Sir James Phillips Kay-Shuttleworth (1804-77), engraving.  
Credit: Wikipedia

## **18th February 1847**

Letter from Manchester Union ....

I am directed by this Union to intimate to you that they are disposed to receive all pauper children at Swinton School for the present on the terms mentioned in the previous letter. And I am desired to point out to you with reference to the admission of children from other unions, the necessity for a Medical Officers certificate as to the health of each child, and for a particular statement as to the religion of each child. It must also be understood that parents of deserted children in the event of their applying, can only have them through the medium of an authority from the union to which the children may be chargeable.

**10th October 1863,  
The Hampshire Advertiser**

**READING ON RAILWAYS INJURIOUS TO THE EYESIGHT.**

Mr. Benjamin Travers, the oculist, used to attribute a good share of his well-earned income to the closely-printed double-columned editions of books which used to vex the human eye in his days. Warning was given, with the usual results. A new danger to vision followed, when reading was indulged in by travellers on railways. Admonition was soon raised against it, but it was unheeded. The consequent evil has been great, and the medical men in England and on the continent are striving to counteract it.

One especially, Dr. Legrand de Saulle, states that the difficulty to which the eye is put by the shaking of the vehicle, often induces a slight congestion of the retina, and that a persistence in the habit may bring on congestion of the brain.

**18th March 1847**

The following list of children sent to the establishment at Swinton was presented:—

<b>Name</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Resident Town</b>
William Stones	Orphan	6	Ashton-under-Lyne
Alice Wroe		7	Ashton-under-Lyne
Mary Ann Worrall		6	Dukinfield
James Rhodes		9	Ashton-under-Lyne
Alice Dawson		9	Ashton-under-Lyne
Ann Dawson		5	Ashton-under-Lyne
Eliza Sutton		9	Ashton-under-Lyne
John Sutton		7	Ashton-under-Lyne
Jonathan Sutton		5	Ashton-under-Lyne
Harriet Slater		8	Ashton-under-Lyne
Samuel Slater		5	Ashton-under-Lyne
Mary Ledward		8	Ashton-under-Lyne
Thomas Ledward		6	Ashton-under-Lyne
George Ormrod		10	Newton
Mary Knowles	Orphan	9	Haughton
Amos Wood		12	Mottram
Lydia Wood		10	Mottram

The Clerk prepared a form for the parents to sign to say that they have given their consent.

**29th September 1847**

.... on the 10th August 1847, the workhouse committee proceeded to Swinton for the purpose of inspecting the children sent by this union to the Industrial School....

On arriving at Swinton, the committee were received by Mr. Shepherd who conducted them to the Boys' School, where they found, placed under the Superintendent, four teachers and several monitors, about 150 boys diligently engaged in scholastic pursuits adapted to the qualification and capacity of each. The Chaplain, who takes a lively interest in the management, was busily employed with a class he had selected from amongst the most advanced on



the second and third form ... in order to test their proficiency in writing and spelling previous to sending them to the head writing class in which copy books and paper are used.... he dictated a few lengthy sentences which were ordered to be written by them on slates. On examination afterwards, there appeared good specimens of neat writing and correct orthography. The elemental class No. 1, comprised of about 50 boys and was placed in the charge of a young man who was giving instructions in writing; the boys were seated at various desks ranged one behind the other and were gradually raised from front to back; immediately before them was fixed a large blackboard on a moveable frame and on this was written in large letters 'circumnavigate' and underneath in different characters, the meaning of the word was given....

The room was not quite so well filled with children as it was when last visited but there was evidently great improvement in their general appearance. There was more of a boyish light-heartedness and less of the melancholy idiotic feature so palpable last year.... It appeared on two days of each week, all are taught shoe-making and mending; cutting out, making and repairing clothes; baking and making bread; gardening and farming. The dormitory was inspected and found particularly clean, neat, and comfortable. The lavatory, kitchen, bake house, workshops and day rooms were in the same satisfactory condition. The next room visited was the Girls' School where much the same routine was practised as in the Boys, the only difference being in the occupations the girls are trained up and are taught knitting, sewing, dressmaking, washing, ironing, and one day a week are sent to take a share in cleaning the rooms.... In the Infants' School they are taught by a new method known as the phonetic, which conveys by a combination of letters, the sounds of words and it is so easily acquired by children that they can with the greatest ease, read the most difficult parts of the Bible and New Testament before they can tell the alphabet. This seems singularly astonishing but such is the fact...

Thomas Walton Mellor [said]: 'The education of the poor should be as it is here, chiefly directed towards industrial pursuits and occupations that will be of service to them in

the station of life which they are most likely to occupy hereafter. The result of pauper education when rightly directed will unquestionably tend to diminish pauperism and whenever there are any children in our workhouse or union deserted by their parents or are left orphans, the committee will urge upon the Guardians to send them at once to Swinton. Principally, the benefit of the school is to give them the means of working out their own independence, and of eventually becoming useful members of society.'



Swinton Industrial School.  
Credit: Digital Salford (Salford Museum and Art Gallery)

### **13th January 1849, Manchester Guardian**

Mr Stephens moved an inquiry into the case of Fanny Ashton. If it was the intention of the board to grant it, he would not detain them with any remarks but would leave them until the inquiry was instituted. He then entered into some reasons why the inquiry should take place, and affirmed that this girl left the house at half past five in the morning, and did not again return before twenty minutes to eight at night except for the dinner time allowed, making fourteen hours and ten minutes during which she was absent from Mr Smith's control, and that she had nothing to eat from dinnertime until she returned, unless she also preserved some of her dinner and took it with her. Mr Stephens went on at length respecting the legality of the proceeding, when the chairman remarked that it would be better to let that part of the subject lie over until there was an inquiry:— Mr Stanley said he would willingly second Mr Stephen's motion for an inquiry into this case, for although the girl was employed in his mill, she was not in his employ, but under a rover, who engaged her and paid her, and he

[Mr Stanley] knew nothing about what time she was away from the house. The mill commenced working at six o'clock; one hour was allowed for breakfast, an hour and a half for dinner, and half an hour for tea. The girl, therefore, worked ten hours, and it would be evident she had time to go to her meals.

Mr Ousey considered a full and searching inquiry had been instructed and therefore moved, as an amendment, that there had been a sufficient inquiry, and they were not inflicting cruelty or hardship on Fanny Ashton, and suggested to Mr Stephens the propriety of withdrawing his motion:— Mr Stephens said he was willing to make the inquiry a general one, and let it be as to the legality of the board employing any pauper labour.... The motion was then put that an inquiry of the board take place as to what should be the practice in future.

#### **17th February 1849, Manchester Guardian**

A letter from the Guardians of the Manchester Union was then read, from which it appeared that they had considered the expenses of the Swinton School establishment, and found they could not keep them under 4s 6d per head; and in answer to a question the clerk said there were thirty children from the Ashton Union there.

The letter also stated that it would be convenient for the committee to visit Swinton on Friday (yesterday) and that a committee from the Manchester Union would also be there – The report of the School Inspector was then read, from which it appeared that he was again dissatisfied with the progress of the children. The committee, however, did not agree with the report of the Inspector as they considered the children had made considerable progress with their education. Mr Bromley, however, agreed with some of the remarks of the Inspector, as he had himself attended the examination of the children, and he could but not remark that they read quite mechanically with respect to the pronunciation of the words, and if any book except a Testament was given to them to read from, they could not read, and it therefore appeared as though they had learned it by rote.

#### **24th February 1849, Manchester Guardian**

The report of the workhouse committee of their visit to Swinton School was then read,

from which it appeared that they considered the children did not appear so healthy as at their last visit; and that on the committee being left (by their request) with the children, they put several questions to them, from which it appeared that they had all been flogged by two of the teachers whose names were given. The general answer given by the children was that they had enough to eat, but the porridge was thin, and they would rather be at Ashton, for which they assigned as a reason that they could see their friends. The committee recommended the withdrawal of three of the children, one named Shaw and two Dearnelleys, they being delicate, and not likely to receive any benefit from the schools....

Mr Stephen intended at the next meeting to move that the whole of the children be removed forthwith, and then the whole question would come before the board....

#### **26th August 1852**

##### *Ashton Workhouse – School Inspector's Report*

The children passed this day [a] tolerable examination, but the questions asked were chiefly answered by 2 or 3 boys – one boy was much superior to the rest. In Arithmetic 2 boys only had advanced beyond the simple rules. The discipline and moral tone of the school did not appear satisfactory. It is very desirable that a schoolmaster be appointed and that the elder boys should be regularly employed in field work. It will be seen from the published report of the Inspector of Union Schools just published that the labour of pauper boys has in very many instances been found decidedly profitable to the rate payers while the acquisition of industrious habits is invaluable to the boys themselves.

The following letter from the schoolmistress Mrs Finch was also read:—

##### *Workhouse, 23rd August 1852*

As I expect you will have the School Inspector's report laid before you tomorrow morning I think I am in duty to myself as well as to the children bound to make some remarks expecting it, and to correct some misapprehensions. I think I have reason to complain of his way of procedure in the presence of the visitors (whose opinion of the instruction I have not heard) as they only read a very short sentence each and were questioned in

Geography although he was distinctly told it was the wish of the Guardians that as they are generally only a very short period in the house they should devote their time to something more essentially requisite, and I think it is very perceptible that by so doing his motive was to make an unfavourable impression on the minds of those Gentlemen.

He says the children passed a tolerable examination, if so what he would call a good one I am at loss to know, as every question excepting one was answered correctly, only in Geography and in that I think only 2 or 3 were answered incorrectly and out of 14 sums 13 were correct.

He says the questions were chiefly answered by 2 or 3 boys. This I deny, for the questions were put and answered in isolation – he says that 3 boys only had advanced beyond the simple rules, but he does not take into consideration the ages, and the scanty instruction they have received before being admitted here, on these points he asked not a single question, and I can attest without contradiction, that not more than one in 20 can tell a letter and not more than 1 in 40 can read words of one syllable correctly and since my commencement here only 3 have been admitted who could read the scriptures....

He says the discipline and moral tone of the school was not satisfactory. I ask whether anyone can reasonably expect from these children the same order as from those in the highest classes of society. I am sure he cannot be ignorant of the destitute state they are generally in, before coming here, and must know that many of them are in no better a situation than orphans left in a trackless desert without a guide to conduct them. I may add that I have the gratification to know that the visitors invariably mention their good behaviour. As to the moral state of the school I leave you to judge for yourselves from what you have seen and know whether any object has been to instil anything into their minds but truth and morality and I trust as long as I hold the situation my aim will be to discharge the duties with justice, conscientiousness and faithfulness.

*The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act mandated at least three hours of lessons each day for children in residence at Union workhouses. The main subjects taught were reading, writing and arithmetic, plus the basic principles of the Christian religion. 'Useful' instruction on working in domestic service for the girls and learning a trade for the boys was also provided. There were mixed feelings from the various Boards of Guardians as to how useful education would be for the pauper children and the standard was very variable.*

#### **8th January 1853, Manchester Courier**

A return was read from Mr Smith, the governor of the workhouse, stating that he had visited the whole of the children who had gone to work out of the workhouse, and he found them all very comfortable in their situations, and most of them attending evening schools. The Board expressed their satisfaction thereon.

#### **18th June 1853, Manchester Courier**

The Chairman suggested the desirability of the guardians offering a reward for the apprehension of the mothers of the two infant children recently found, one in a ditch on the Moss, the other in a wheelbarrow on the Market Place, but it appeared they had no power.

#### **16th July 1853, Manchester Courier**

Another child found – The inhuman practice of 'child dropping'\* is actively carried on in this district. On the 11th inst. another child, apparently about three weeks old, was found alive behind a haystack in Droylsden. It was taken possession by a female in the neighbourhood, whom the guardians on Thursday allowed 2s a week, she agreeing to bring the child up. This is the fourth child similarly deserted within a few weeks.

#### **5th April 1855**

##### *Board of Guardians*

On the recommendation of the workhouse committee It was Agreed that John Whitworth who has been apprenticed to Mr Ralph Hobson shoemaker for 8 years be transferred to Mr John Marsland of Church St Ashton, shoemaker, for the remainder of the term and that the chairman be authorised to attach the Union Seal to the endorsement to that effect upon the indenture.

**28th September 1867, Bury Times**

A chimney sweeper at Huddersfield has been fined for employing 'climbing boys.'

**19th April 1856, Ashton Reporter**

The attention of the Workhouse Committee was again drawn to the subject of additional aid in the school, there being 71 scholars and only one teacher. The number of boys in the house, from 9 to 16 years of age, having been lately above the average, a conversation took place as to the best means of finding them employment. It was suggested that spinners in want of piecers would often be willing to engage to employ such and keep them under their own roof.

**1st May 1856**

Mr Dean stated to the Board that a girl from the Workhouse of the name of Sophia Kenworthy aged 14 years, who has been living with a man of the name of Henry Proctor for upwards of 5 years, until the last 2-3 months, during this time she has been residing with Mr Pomfret of Turner Lane, has now returned her to the house in consequence of certain statements the girl had made of the shameful conduct of Proctor towards her. The girl appeared before the committee, and was also examined by Mr Wood the medical officer who gave it as his opinion that the assault with intent had been committed and the committee requested to know from the Board what should be done in the matter.

It was Agreed that the case be left for further investigation by the committee and should they consider it desirable to proceed against the man the Board will sanction any proceedings that the committee may think proper to take.

**11th December 1857**

A letter was read from Pablo Tangué, the proprietor of the Allied Circus, Market Place offering to admit the workhouse children to the performance on Saturday afternoon without charge and it was Resolved that the children were allowed to go.

**24th July 1862,  
The North Devon Journal**

BALLOON EXPERIMENTS.— The balloon committee of the British Association made another successful attempt to ascend from Wolverhampton, on Thursday morning.

Mr. Glashier, the superintendent of the Meteorological department, and Mr. Coxwell, the well-known aeronaut, started on their aerial voyage soon after 9 o'clock, and at 7 o'clock in the evening a telegram was received from Mr. Glashier, stating that the balloon had descended near Oakham, at about noon, after an altitude of nearly five miles had been reached.

The temperature at that height was 16 degrees, the air very dry, and the electricity positive.

**26th February 1859**

Mr Dean stated that two boys had absconded from the house last week, taking with them the clothes in which they stood which belonged to the house. Their names were James Kenworthy and Christopher Bannon.

**23rd July 1859, Ashton Reporter**

Mr Dean remarked that an application had been made by parties in Denton connected with the hat trade for two of the girls in the workhouse. Mr Peacock, one of the guardians for Denton, knowing the severity with which one of the applicants treated such children, said he could not sanction a girl being sent there. Here Mr Bradbury mentioned.... that a workhouse girl had been placed under the guardianship of a party at Denton, but had been so overworked and ill-treated that the poor thing had run away, and whether she had returned to the workhouse, he knew not.

**10th January 1863, Ashton Reporter**

Treat to the Workhouse Children

On New Year's Day the children in the workhouse were treated to a good supply of gingerbread snaps, and each boy and girl, in addition, was



presented with a little book from the same source and through the same channel as the Christmas treat to all children and infants.

### **3rd August 1863, Ashton Reporter**

From the master's day book it appeared that on Monday last the children at the workhouse were regaled with currant buns, tea and sweetmeats at the expense of Mr Lees, at his school in Lees; and also that Mr Whittaker of Hurst, Mr Hulme and Mr James Slack of Ashton, kindly sent conveyances to convey them to Lees.

### **4th August 1864**

A notice was received from the Guardians of the Poor of the Altrincham Union of their intention to bind John Cawthorne aged 13 years to Mr William Jackson, Felt Hatter, Newton Moor, near Hyde for 8 years and requesting that should the binding be open to any objection, the same would be reported to them in due course.

*Despite widespread misgivings, the Boards of Guardians retained the responsibility of organising apprenticeships for pauper boys and girls, even after the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. Additional regulations were, however, introduced in order to prevent abuse of the system. The Poor Law Commission subsequently issued an order that apprentices must be at least nine years old, able to read, and write their name. No monetary incentive would be provided to the employer unless the child had a permanent disability. The length of the apprenticeship was to be no more than eight years. The 1851 Poor Law (Apprentices) Act further stipulated regular visits from the receiving officer with ill-treatment leading to prosecution. Yet there were still too many reports of mistreatment, a situation which eventually led to further reforms.*

### **1st September 1864**

An application was received from Mr Joseph James Kenworthy of 1 Edinghall Street, Openshaw, Grocer and Provisions Dealer to have Walter Stepney aged 11 years apprenticed to him for 7 years.

It was Agreed that the request be acceded to and that the Clerk be instructed to send the requisite notice to the Guardians of the Chorlton Union of the intentions of the Board.

*Walter Stepney appears on the 1861 census living with grandparents Jane and David Hilton at 4 Brierley Houses, Bardsley Vale. Following*

*his grandfather's death, Walter's only recourse was the workhouse. By 1881 he was back on his feet, now working as a general labourer and married to one Betty Walsh. The couple lived on Cambridge Street, Ashton-under-Lyne.*

### **22nd December 1864**

It was Resolved that the Chairman be authorised to affix the Union Seal to an indenture of apprenticeship in duplicate purporting to bind Humphrey Smith, aged 12 years, chargeable to Ashton, to Mr. John Smith of Back Lane, Newton, Felt Hatter, for the period of 7 years.

### **19th January 1865**

A notice was received from the Guardians of the Poor of the Altrincham Union of their intention to bind Joseph Williamson aged 13 years, to Mr Thomas Turner of Newton Felt Hatter for 7 years and requesting that the binding be open to objections the same may be reported to them in due course.

*Joseph Williamson is listed on the 1871 census as a nineteen-year-old hat blocker, living as a lodger at 56 King Street, Hurst, Ashton-under-Lyne.*

### **26th January 1865**

A notice was received from the Guardians of the Poor of the Stockport Union of their intention to bind Charles William Johnson aged 14 years, to Mr Samuel Lowe of Godley Hill, Godley Felt Hatter for 7 years and requesting that the binding be open to objections the same may be reported to them in due course.

*Charles Johnson is recorded on the 1871 census as a hatter, living as a lodger on Print Street, Audenshaw at the age of twenty-one.*

### **9th February 1865**

Mr Joseph Brooks of Godley Hill, Godley, Hyde, Hatter applied to the Guardians to cancel the Indenture of Apprenticeship William Marland to him for 8 years, on account of the boy running away to his parents in Manchester, and It was Resolved that the sanction of the Board be given to the cancelling of the Indenture and that the Union Seal be affixed to an endorsement to that effect.

An application was made by Mr Edmund Greenhalgh, Hairdresser, of Clarendon Place, Hyde for the consent of the Guardians to the

cancelling of the Indenture of Apprenticeship which bears the date of 7th December 1861 binding Thomas Holt aged twelve years to him for seven years on account of general disobedience. Mr Beeley had visited the apprentice during the week and submitted the report. It was Resolved that unless there be a more serious cause than has been assigned, the application will not be entertained.

**8th June 1865**

Resolved that an order be forwarded to Halifax for the admission into the workhouse of William Lerner aged 14 years and Mary Lerner aged 10 years chargeable to Ashton who have been deserted by their mother.

**28th October 1843,  
Illustrated London News**

The printed books in the  
British Museum library occupy  
ten miles of shelf.

**4th January 1866**

Mr Daley reported that Mr and Mrs George Booth and Mr Harry Winterbottom, Mossley had sent a New Year's gift consisting of oranges, apples and nuts on Monday last, and that Mr J.D. Smith, Tailor of Ashton, had presented each child with a currant bun which, at the same time, had enabled him to get up an evening's entertainment on New Year's Day.

*Joseph D. Smith owned a tailor and draper business on Stamford Street, Ashton-under-Lyne. Established in 1820, the shop carried 'every description of Men's Wearing Apparel.'*

**17th May 1866**

A letter was received from the Revd W Hoare of Stalybridge bringing under the notice of the Board the case of a blind boy named William Henry Bowden aged 13 years, and urging his removal to Henshaw's Blind Asylum. It was agreed that the clerk be instructed to inform Mr Hoare that the Guardians cannot legally pay the cost of maintenance of children at Henshaw Blind Asylum as that institution has been placed under Government inspection but that an equivalent will be allowed as poor relief to the family.

*Opened in 1822 thanks to a bequest of £20,000 given by Thomas Henshaw, an Oldham property magnate, the Henshaw Blind Asylum was officially known as the 'Manchester Asylum for the Indigent Blind.' A number of these institutions could be found throughout the country, the first of which was established in Liverpool in 1756. Such facilities aimed to provide education, employment and welfare for the disadvantaged.*

**1st November 1866**

Mr Darcy also reported that on Wednesday the school children were entertained free of charge with an exhibition of the 'Mechanical Spectres' exhibited at the Mechanics Institute, Stalybridge.

**20th December 1866**

The Workhouse Master reported that Mrs George Booth of Brookbottom, Mossley had sent her usual Christmas present of oranges and nuts for the children.

**27th December 1866**

The Workhouse Master reported that on Christmas Day each child who attends school was presented with a copy of Dr Watts' Divine and Moral Songs' and two pence in money and all the children in the nursery with two pence and sweet cakes by Miss Rayner of Bowden. Through Mr Wood, Town Missionary, Ashton, Miss Cheetham and her pupils have presented the children with some new dolls, balls, shuttletops, whips and sundry other toys and Mrs R Benson of Stalybridge has forwarded two dolls and a few other toys.

**10th January 1867**

The Workhouse Master reported that the school children had been allowed admission to the Bazaar at the Albion School free of charge and that Mr Henry Johnson, Greengrocer had presented them with a number of oranges.

**Grand Exhibition at Albion Sunday Schools –  
Ashton Reporter**

On Thursday last this most excellent exhibition of works of art, manufacture and curiosities was opened. The purpose of this project is to raise a sum of money, which, with a bazaar to be held in May next, is expected will be the means of rubbing off a debt of about £6,000, now resting on these magnificent schools, which were erected in 1862 at a cost of £11,000.

**24th January 1867**

The Workhouse Master reported that Mr Coates, Grocer of Ashton had presented the children with 30lbs of figs.

**21st March 1867**

Mr Joseph Wharmby of Godley appeared before the Board to inform the Guardians that his apprentice William Hannon ran away from his house on the 14th and had not since returned and on account of the diseased state of the boy's body and his general disobediences, which had previously been reported to the Relieving Officer, he wished his Indenture cancelled.

**28th March 1867**

The School inspector's report of his examination of the Workhouse children on the 19th instant was read stating that the general condition of the school continues to be credible to the schoolmistress.

**20th February 1864,  
Western Gazette**

Manchester is making active preparations for the coming Shakespeare celebration. The Mayor and a number of leading merchants have subscribed fifty pounds each, and nearly one thousand pounds are already promised. Manchester will contribute something to the Stratford commemoration, will found two scholarships for the promotion of the study of English literature, and will procure a marble bust of the bard to grace her town hall.

**20th June 1867**

The Workhouse Master reported that Mr William Ogden had presented the children in the House with a currant bun each on Whit Friday.

**27th June 1867, Ashton Reporter**

Mr. Hadfield, Hatter, Stamford Street, Ashton had presented the workhouse children with 62 boys' cloth caps – The Board unanimously passed a vote of thanks for this useful and generous present.

**11th July 1867**

James Horsfield of Newton, Hatter appeared before the Board relative to the charge made against him of ill-treating his apprentice John Daniel Smith. The Guardians were not satisfied with Horsfield's explanation, and It was Agreed to refer the matter to the Workhouse Committee to make some further enquiries of the boy who is in the Workhouse relative to the improper treatment of which he has complained.

**14th November 1867**

Mr Daley reported that Mr Newsome proprietor of the Circus now stationed in Ashton had allowed the Workhouse children free admission to the day performance on Saturday afternoon last.

**19th December 1867**

Mr Daley reported that the following persons had kindly forwarded the undermentioned articles for the workhouse children viz-Mrs George Booth of Mossley, 120 oranges, 12lbs of nuts and a miscellaneous collection of children's weekly periodicals. The children of R. B. Benson Esq of Alderley Edge, a quantity of old toys, 35 Nos. of the 'Sunday at Home' and a miscellaneous collection of other periodicals, together with 5 shillings to buy oranges for the children. Mrs James Brown of Ashton Greengrocer, 56 lbs of apples.

**16th January 1868**

Mr Daley reported that on Monday evening the entertainment by the Workhouse Children was repeated and that Mr J Smith and a number of other gentlemen had again favoured them with a nice selection of instrumental music.

**2nd May 1868, Ashton Reporter**

Generosity to the workhouse children The workhouse master reported that on Saturday last, the Hurst Cross Committee presented the children at the Workhouse with sixty good currant buns – A vote of thanks to the donors of this serviceable gift was unanimously passed.

**18th May 1861,  
Carmarthen Weekly Reporter**

The Common Council of London have made a grant of £750 towards the gilding of and ornamentation of St Paul's Cathedral.

**11th June 1868**

Mr Daley reported that the Workhouse children were on Tuesday last allowed admission to Belle Vue Gardens, and Mr Whitaker had again kindly allowed them to be conveyed thither in one of his waggons which afforded the children a rich treat, and whilst in the Gardens a Gentleman whom he did not know presented each child with a currant bun.

**17th September 1868**

A letter was received from the Guardians of the Altrincham Union of their intention to bind Thomas Foster aged 12 years, as an apprentice to Mr Thomas Stansfield of Commercial Brow, Newton, Felt Hatter for six years and requesting to be informed if such proposed binding be open to objection.

**29th October 1868**

The Relieving Officers' submitted their reports respecting the visits paid to the children in service and apprenticed by the Guardians which in the main was considered satisfactory.

**31st December 1868**

Mr Daley reported that a number of other parties had made presents to the Workhouse Inmates since the last meeting to enable the children to have a Tea party on New Year's Day and It was Resolved that the best thanks of the Board be tendered to them for their gifts.

**1st April 1869**

The Workhouse Master reported that Mr William Morley of Ashton had presented the Workhouse Children with 70 currant buns on Good Friday and It was Resolved that the thanks of the Board be accorded to Mr Morley for his gift.

**28th October 1869**

Resolved that the best thanks of the Board be tendered to the Freemasons who subscribed at their Banquet on Saturday last the sum of

£5.5s.0d to afford a treat to the Workhouse children and that the Workhouse Master be instructed to apply it to that purpose as early as possible.



Pauper Children in the East End. Illustrated London News (16th February 1867). Credit: Manchester Archives+

*'Let the reader go into the children's side of any prison in England, or, I grieve to add, of many workhouses, and judge whether those are monsters who disgrace our streets, people our hulks and penitentiaries, and overcrowd our penal colonies, or are creatures whom we have deliberately suffered to be bred for misery and ruin.'*

*Martin Chuzzlewit, Charles Dickens (1844)*

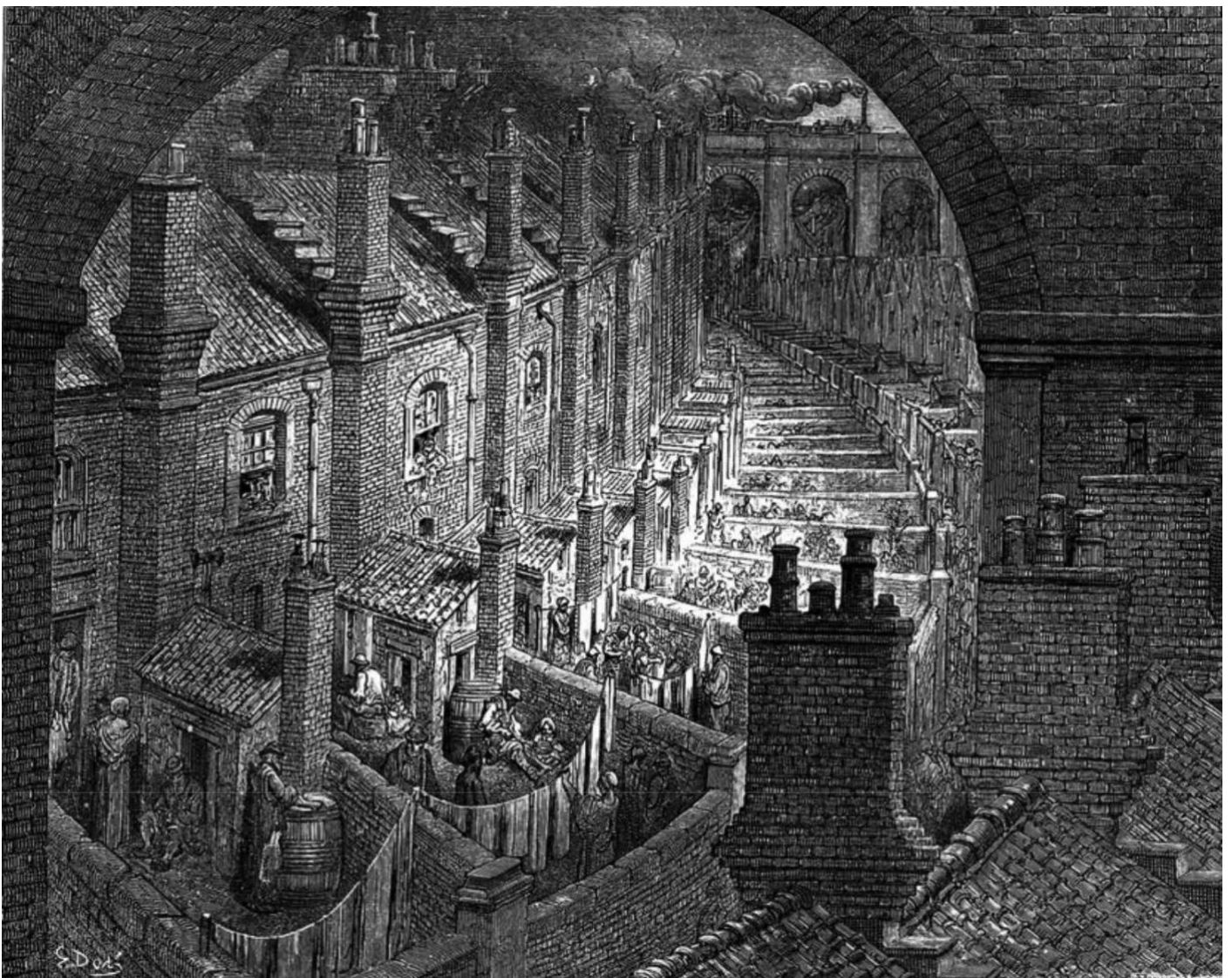


# Disease & Death

Poverty and disease go hand in hand and the nineteenth century was no exception to this. Typhus and cholera, conditions associated with poor living conditions, lack of clean water and minimal sanitation, were rife in the crowded back-to-back housing of the ever-expanding towns and cities. The immigration of the Irish in the 1830s and 1840s into the poverty-stricken areas of cities and towns such as Manchester, Liverpool and Ashton-under-Lyne, placed even greater strain on the question of the poor in Victorian society and how to manage those who had fallen upon hard times. Too many ended up in the workhouse, where, already weakened by brutal living conditions, they succumbed to the harsh conditions. By the standards of the day, some workhouses were tolerably run. Food, although basic, was of a reasonable quantity and cleanliness was adequate, but there were far too many institutions where, in spite of

legislation dictated by the Poor Law Commission, conditions were not satisfactory, and the poor and vulnerable existed under very difficult circumstances.

This destitution and suffering rendered life very precarious and deaths and injuries were commonplace. Newspaper references relating to industrial accidents were many, as safety regulations in the workplace were minimal at best. There were also a huge number of domestic accidents as a result of using candles and open fires in the home. With little understanding of how to treat burns – one remedy was to throw flour over the wound – both children and adults must have died in agony, as indicated by one report informing readers that the deceased ‘lingered in a most deplorable state of suffering.’



London slums. Gustave Doré (1872). Credit: Wellcome Collection

### **22nd October 1846**

The Workhouse Visiting Committee have had under their notice the subject of a fever ward recommended to them by the Board.

After consulting with the Medical Officer of the Workhouse and giving the fullest consideration to it they do not think it advisable on account of the confined space within the walls of the Workhouse and the injurious consequences that might result to the other paupers by the admission of an unlimited number of fever patients, to construct a fever ward. Neither do they find that there are any adjacent premises suitable for the purpose, possession of which could be obtained in time to meet the pressing necessities of the case.

### **10th December 1846**

Letter from Charles Anderton Medical Officer No 5 (Staley) district

Under the head of observation in my weekly report.... I should be compelled to prefer a most serious charge against the Relieving Office for the Dukinfield District in the case of Noble Pagett, a child of 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  yrs for gross neglect and inhuman conduct.... On Friday last Dec 4th I received a medical order from Mr John Newton to attend upon the said child who had been labouring under measles and residing in Smiths Yard, off High St, Stalybridge.... On entering the house where the poor creature lived, the scene which presented itself was most appalling, revolting I may truly say to the feelings of any Christian. Thomas Pagett, the father and Ann Pagett, the mother were standing over their child who was stretched out on some shavings on the floor almost in a state of nudity. There was neither chair, table, bed nor bedding of any description in the house and for what little fire they had they were indebted to a lodger.

A fortnight before this the mother made application to Mr Newton for relief, stating she had a sick child. She waited at his house for many hours and at length was directed to a public house.... When she found him in a state quite unfitting him for any business, the observations he made were that if she did not begone he would send her out of the County. The day after this the father called three times without being able to see him but was blackguarded and ordered out of the house

by Newton's wife. He called twice on the third day when he was relieved with a shilling and told that he would be visited. Nearly a fortnight elapsed from this time however before he was called upon.... It was now he wrote out the Medical Order, but it was too late, for the child was fast sinking and died in a few hours.... I leave the matter entirely in your hands...

### **16th April 1859, Dundee, Perth, Forfar, and Fife People's Journal**

During the month of March there were registered, in the eight principal towns of Scotland, the births of 2934 children. Of that number, 2688 were legitimate, and 246 illegitimate, which gives the proportion of one illegitimate in every 11.9 births, or 8.3 per cent of the births as illegitimate.

The proportion of illegitimate births in Dundee, 11.4 per cent; and in Aberdeen, (highest, as usual), 12.1 per cent.

### **17th December 1846**

The order of the Board of Guardians constituting the said committee was read and a letter from Mr Charles Anderton Medical Officer for No 5 district to the board, also the several examinations of Thomas and Ann Pagett, Mary Ann Dyson, Ann Smith, Rev John Leeson, Alice Drury, Charles Anderton, John Rayner and John Newton taken by Charles Hudson, Coroner for the division of Dukinfield on an inquisition taken on view of the body of Noble Pagett a pauper deceased in the said Union.

Your committee beg to report that after careful and impartial perusal of the evidence taken on Oath before the coroner, they have come to an unanimous opinion that the charge preferred by Mr Anderton against Mr John Newton, for gross neglect and inhuman conduct in the case of Noble Pagett a child of 1 $\frac{3}{4}$  years is fully borne out.... and that the said John Newton is in the opinion of the committee unfit to discharge the duties of a Relieving Officer.

Letter from Alfred Austin (Assistant Poor Law Commissioner)

.... As the charge against Mr Newton is of a very serious character, I take the liberty of suggesting to you the propriety of the Guardians not accepting his resignation if tendered, but leaving the case to be dealt with by the Commissioners. The Guardians have the authority to suspend him in the performance of his duties which will be quite sufficient to protect the poor of his district...

Resolved that Mr John Newton be suspended from his situation of Relieving Officer, and hand in all of his books into the Clerk.

The Coroner's report and all of the correspondence in the case of Mr Newton were forwarded onto the Commissioners. Mr Newton received a copy of the letter sent to them and had access to any documents relative to his case.

#### **24th December 1846**

Letter from Poor Law Commission.... The commissioners having carefully perused and considered the documents are of the opinion that there has been gross neglect on the part of the Relieving Officer to visit the case of Noble Pagett and give an order for Medical relief.... The coroner's inquest was conclusive on this point and Mr Newton's explanation altogether fails satisfactorily to account for or excuse neglect.

The evidence of Mr Rayner the Medical Officer shows that if medical attendance had been given at an early stage of the attack the life of the child would probably have been saved.

It appears further from the evidence of Mr Pagett and Alice Drury and is admitted by Newton himself that he passed a large portion of one day at a public house drinking and playing at cards and that he was not sober when he went home.

The Commissioners think that the Guardians judged correctly in suspending him immediately from his office and they consider his unfitness for the situation of Relieving Officer to be completely proved.

They therefore issue an order for his dismissal.

#### **31st December 1846**

A letter was received from Poor Law Commission to the Guardians of the Poor and to John Newton dismissing him of his duties as Relieving Officer.

#### **11th February 1847**

Letter from Poor Law Commission

I am directed by the Poor Law Commission to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 12th inst in which you state that the Board of Guardians of Ashton-under-Lyne Union have not been able to provide fever wards in the Workhouse, because there is no room for making such arrangements.

The Commissioners think it right under the circumstances to bring under the notice of the Guardians the present state of the workhouse accommodation of the Union; and urge upon their consideration the expediency of providing a new workhouse suitable to the wants of the Union.

The Commissioners are induced to make this suggestion in consequence of the want which at present exists of proper accommodation for the pauper inmates generally of a union so large as that of Ashton-under-Lyne; and consequently of the deficiency of the means of furnishing a test for able bodied applicants for relief, but more particularly an account of the deficiency in the accommodation for the sick which is admitted by the Guardians.

The Commissioners cannot too strongly urge the great importance of providing the means of affording adequate relief to sick paupers and especially in cases of an infectious nature....

#### **18th February 1847**

From the Medical Officer of the Workhouse to Board of Guardians

I beg to call the attention of the Board of Guardians to the medical report of the Union Workhouse. I think it desirable for some competent person to be placed in charge of the sick. The medical treatment must in a great measure depend upon due attention to the remedies prescribed, – and whilst I am unable to ascertain the effect of the treatment, especially in children of which there are at present many ill

and some of them dangerous, I often find that the medicine has not been duly administered. I would also observe that as the workhouse is used for the purpose of preventing feigned disease this object cannot be fully realised without some plan of the kind I have suggested.

**10th February 1855,  
Illustrated London News**

A new process has been invented in Birmingham which makes bricks nearly as hard as stones. One of the new bricks sustains a weight of 2625 lbs; a common hand-made brick breaks at 640lbs.

**25th March 1847**

The Workhouse Visiting Committee report was received; within it was found that the state of the workhouse was generally satisfactory as far as the premises will allow.

In consequence of representations made at this meeting of the great prevalence of Typhus Fevers it was Moved by Mr Robinson and Seconded by Mr Bradbury that a committee be appointed to enquire what buildings there are in the neighbourhood at liberty and at what price suitable for fever wards.

*Winifred M. Bowman clarifies the state of the medical facilities in the Ashton Union Workhouse at that time in her work 'England in Ashton-under-Lyne.'*

*'The Medical Officer insisted, before the Board of Guardians, that he could not hope to treat the suffering inmates of the Workhouse successfully in the completely inadequate accommodation of the sick which was afforded by the little 'two by four' hospital in the backyard.'*

*The Guardians agreed to build a new workhouse hospital in June 1847.*

**24th April 1847, Manchester Courier**

*Typhus Fever*

We regret to find that this dangerous disease still exists in this town and neighbourhood to an alarming extent. Several cases have

terminated fatally. It is worthy of remark, that those generally affected by the malady, are Irish people who have lately come into the district. Mr Roberts, one of the relieving officers, has caught the fever, and is at the present time lying in a most dangerous state.

*Typhus is a bacterial infection spread by lice, fleas or mites. Common symptoms include fever, headache and a rash.*

**29th April 1847**

The Guardians of the Union have heard of the death of Mr Roberts one of the relieving officers, with great regret especially as he appears to have contracted the disease which has terminated fatally whilst in the performance of his duty in visiting a fever case in his district a short time ago and they take this opportunity to record their high estimate of his character and efficiency as an officer and their sincere sympathy for his bereaved widow and family.

**13th May 1847**

Mr Wood appeared before the Board and complained of the sick in the Workhouse not being attended to. He stated that the sick women were almost in a state of nudity in consequence of not being properly attended to and medicines ill administered. The nurse being sick, he also stated that she was inefficient for the office when well.

Resolved that the Workhouse Visiting Committee engage a nurse to attend the sick in the Workhouse.

**20th May 1847**

In Dr Lees medical return was the following memorandum – Cases 298, 325 & 326 were in the same small room and the only bedding, two heaps of shavings and a very scanty covering. No 325 H Carvill was one of the worst cases of typhus I have ever seen. The infection was received from Mary Shannon now recovered. The Rev Mr Powers the Catholic priest is supposed to have taken the infection by visiting Mary Shannon.

**12th June 1847, Manchester Guardian**

*Typhus Fever*

We are sorry to state that this contagious disease prevails in Ashton, Stalybridge and neighbourhood, to an alarming extent. From a report drawn up by Mr Superintendent



**23rd July 1859,  
Illustrated London News**

The Duke of Northumberland has just given a thousand bottles of the finest sherry for the use of patients at Westminster Hospital.

Hickey, it appears that there are in Stalybridge 29 cases, 22 of which are of the worst description. In one house there are eleven persons attacked with fever. We are informed that the cases in Ashton are much more numerous than those in Stalybridge.

**23rd June 1847, Manchester Guardian**

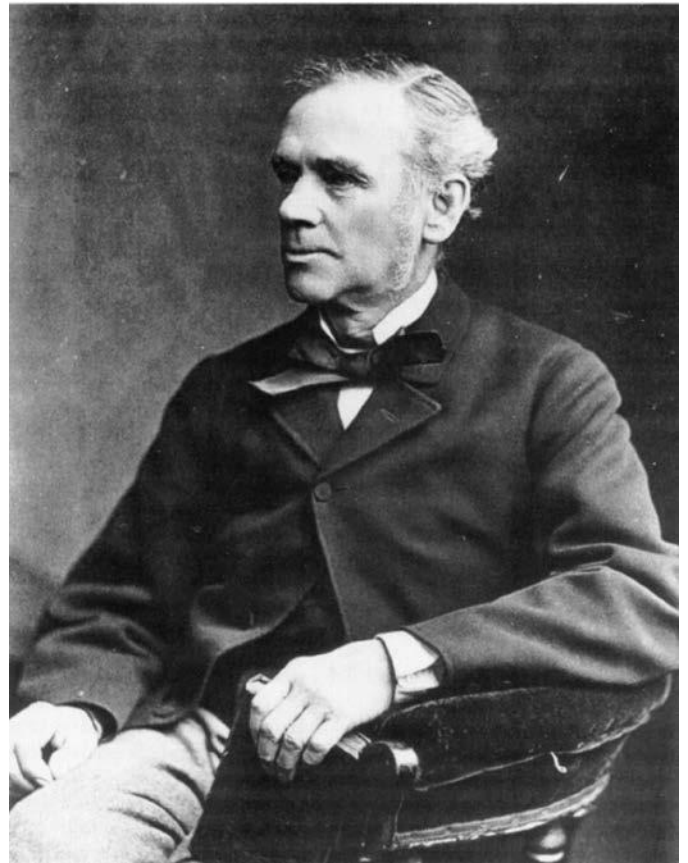
To the Editor of the Manchester Guardian

My last letter was written solely with a view of showing the impropriety of placing a fever hospital in Crickett's Lane: but, when writing, I thought I might put forth a remark or two in aid of the efforts now being made by a part of the guardians to erect a new workhouse. The room which I stated contained nine beds, I find contains ten, which are occupied nightly by thirty individuals, the number of fever cases in the workhouse is twenty-three. In one house in Crickett's Brow there were eight cases of typhus fever.... and in one relieving officer's district there were ninety six cases of typhus fever, last week. The necessity for the erection of a suitable workhouse and fever hospital is very manifest.... Apologising for the length of my remarks, I remain Sir, yours obediently,  
Hugh Mason

June 21, 1847

**Hugh Mason (1817–1886)**

*In 1857, Hugh Mason, cotton manufacturer, became a magistrate and mayor of Ashton. From 1880–1885 he served as a Liberal MP for Ashton-under-Lyne. Whilst in Parliament, Hugh Mason advocated the extension of the franchise to women, but only to ratepayers who were 'spinsters and widows.' Other issues championed were sham clubs (unlicensed drinking establishments) and 'the great evil of intemperance.'*



Portrait of Hugh Mason, MP for Ashton-under-Lyne (1880-1885).  
Credit: Wikipedia

**30th June 1847, Manchester Guardian**

The Ashton Fever Ward – The premises in Cricketts Lane taken as a fever hospital, have undergone extensive alterations, and were ready for the reception of patients on Thursday last, since which day

48 cases have been taken into the house; of these, 42 are Irish and 6 English. We understand that 12 more cases were received yesterday; these latter were also Irish.

**5th January 1848**

Letter from Poor Law Board

.... The Board observe that the committee state that the ventilation of the various rooms in the workhouse is very unsatisfactory and the day and sleeping rooms are not considered to be healthy in consequence...

**29th September 1849, Manchester Courier**

The minutes of the previous meeting having been confirmed, the report of the workhouse committee was read, from which it appeared there had been less sickness in the workhouse than there had been for a long time previously. The relieving officers reported that cholera was much abated in the town.

**12th April 1851, Manchester Guardian**

To the editor of the Manchester Guardian Sir,— I am sorry to be obliged to record the most appalling case of disease, resulting from privation, I have ever observed. It is a case of malignant erysipelas. The patient is a married female, betwixt 30 and 40 years old; separated from her husband, and having four small children. She lives in Waterloo, in this town [Ashton], with her own parents. About a fortnight ago I was called to attend upon her, when she was extremely emaciated and exhausted, having erysipelas affecting her head, the face and the neck. About the same period, the relieving and the medical officer of the district visited her. The medical officer departed without giving an opinion or any assistance.

From the parish she has obtained only five shillings. From her own neighbours she has obtained very little assistance. Her parents are poor, and her husband is indolent following no regular employment. She is awfully emaciated, afflicted with ulcers, sloughs [slough or dead tissue is a yellow or white covering on a wound that can inhibit healing], and abscesses. She is, and has been unfit to be removed from her own residence during the whole period of my attendance upon her.

To afford her any reasonable chance of recovery, liberal diet and good nursing were indispensable. With some wine, money and medicine I have supplied her, expecting she might obtain the remainder which was necessary to support her elsewhere. However in this receipt I have been disappointed, as apparently her recovery is hopeless, for want of sufficient and proper nourishment.

I humbly submit this case to you for publication in order to obtain the public opinion upon it.

I am, sir, your obedient servant  
M.D. Thompson, Surgeon

*Erysipelas, a bacterial infection in the upper layer of the skin caused by streptococcus, was a fairly common condition amongst the nineteenth-century poor, as sanitation was usually very primitive. Symptoms include skin ulcers, fever, chills and nausea.*

**4th December 1857**

The attention of the Guardians having been called to the condition of Back Crab Street, Ashton under Lyne, It was Resolved that considering the number of cases that have been or are from time to time sent from that place to the hospital labouring under venereal and other diseases, this meeting consider it a great public nuisance and would strongly recommend that the Town Council to exercise the power vested in them to cause the said street to be cleared away as soon as possible.

**17th January 1846,  
Manchester Examiner**

At the usual meeting of the Wadebridge (Cornwall) Farmers' Club, on the 10th ult., some of the farmers refused to drink the health of Prince Albert, because, as they said, he had objected to pay his poor-rate. The toast was therefore not proposed.

**5th March 1859, Ashton Reporter**

Mr Mellor then directed the attention of the board to a most painful circumstance relating to the treatment of an orphan child which had been sent to the workhouse during the week, suffering from serious burns about its body. The circumstances, he said, were rather peculiar. The child was seriously burned on Tuesday afternoon last and Mr Cook, one of the union surgeons, was called in to attend it. After seeing the child, and giving directions for applying the usual remedies, he ordered it to be taken to the workhouse, and left a certificate for that purpose. Mr Pierce received the certificate in due form and the child was taken to the workhouse about five or six in the evening, on the understanding that Mr Wood, the house surgeon, would follow. The child was there received in its dangerous state by Mr Towler, the master of the hospital who sent down to Mr Wood for medicine. Mr Wood was not at home but the required medicine was obtained, and on the following day, at seven o'clock in the morning, he saw the child a short time before its death. As Mr Cook had seen the child in the first instance, Mr Wood would naturally think it all right as far as attention

went. He thought there ought to be a delegate or deputy appointed to look after them.

Discussion ensued.

Mr Mellor; I think there is blame attached to Mr Cook, for allowing the child to go as it was. There will have to be an inquest over the body. We think Mr Cook very much to blame in ordering it to be removed, under the circumstances. The grievance is, that child was sent out at five o'clock, but it was not seen before seven o'clock the next morning.

Mr Pierce: I asked the person who brought the child if Mr Cook had applied any remedy. She replied, "yes, he has done what he considered necessary," having applied oil, and limewater, and other things.

The Chairman – The Workhouse Committee will make a better inquiry than we should. The subject then dropped, the members generally agreeing with the latter suggestion.

#### **18th June 1863**

Mr Brierley Medical Officer appeared before the Board relative to the charge of neglect to give prompt attention to the case of Abel Cartwright's wife who had met with a serious accident and only survived a few days, the circumstances of the case were fully gone into and after considerable discussion, It was Resolved that the Board regrets to find that Mr Brierley has neglected to attend a very serious case of accident for seventeen hours and censured his conduct for such actions.

#### **8th September 1864**

Resolved that the subscription of £10-10-00 TO THE Manchester Eye Hospital be continued for the ensuing year.

*The Manchester Eye Hospital was founded in 1814 by a surgeon from Leeds, William James Wilson. The hospital opened in King Street in 1815, relying on gifts and donations for funding. In 1827 it moved to Faulkner Street, then Princess Street in 1874, and to St John's Street in 1882, before finally transferring to purpose-built facilities on Oxford Road in 1886.*

#### **25th August 1866**

A letter was read from Mr Hudson stating that on submitting to chemical analysis and examination, the sample of water received from the Ashton Workhouse, he finds that it contains a tolerably large amount of Sulphate of Lime, Carbonates of Lime i.e. that it is free from lead but contains a small amount of inorganic matter and nitrates. In his opinion as a Sanitary Chemist, the presence of organic matter even in small proportions, renders the water unfit for drinking purposes, and he would advise the use of good drinking water, such as is supplied by Manchester Water Works Company....

.... Mr Slater said that it has been stated to him that the skimmed milk at present, supplied to the House was of a very inferior quality, and it was Agreed that the complaint be referred to the Workhouse Committee for investigation.

#### **27th September 1866**

A letter was received from Mr Alfred Firth of No 1 Cannon Street Manchester, charging one of the Medical Officers with great inhumanity in refusing to notice a poor woman who was struggling with a severe fit on Stalybridge Road as he passed on Monday last. It was Agreed that the clerk be instructed to ask the writer for the name of the medical man to whom he refers.

**MANCHESTER EYE HOSPITAL, No. 3, South Parade.—**  
**February 13.—Patients admitted, 46.—Patients discharged, 39.—**  
**Patients under treatment, 603.—Consulting surgeon, Mr. Windsor,**  
**on Saturday.—Surgeons: Mr. Windsor, on Monday and Thursday;**  
**Mr. Hunt, on Tuesday and Friday; Mr. Redfern and Mr. Bent,**  
**on Wednesday and Saturday.—Assistant surgeons: Mr. Thomas**  
**Windsor and Mr. Birch.**

Weekly summary of the admissions and discharges of the Manchester Eye Hospital, as listed in the Manchester Guardian (16th February 1857). Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives



**10th October 1864, Manchester Guardian**

**Mr Gladstone's Visit to Bolton and Farnworth**

Great preparations are being made, both at Bolton and Farnworth, to give a cordial greeting to the Chancellor of the Exchequer who will visit Bolton tomorrow afternoon, and on the day following will open the public park at Farnworth. The right honourable gentleman will arrive at the Trinity-Street Station, Bolton at 4.33 where he will be met by the Mayor and Town Clerk... and Mr Alfred Barnes, Chairman of the Farnworth Local Board. These gentlemen will escort Mr Gladstone to the Free Public Library, where he will be met by Mr. Cannon and other members of the Library and Member Committee.

**4th October 1866**

A letter was received from Mr Alfred Firth of Manchester stating that the Medical Gentleman referred to in his previous communication was Mr Hopwood of Stalybridge. Mr Hopwood has since stated that the reason for not volunteering his service as he passed the crowd was because he was convinced that the woman said to be in a fit was an imposter. Board agreed that it was a matter over which they had no jurisdiction....

**16th January 1868**

Another letter was received from the Poor Law Board relating to the inadequate provision for the sick inmates of our Workhouse until the New building is available, and as a precaution against overcrowding in the Hospital during the winter, the Board advised the Guardians to appropriate a ward or wards in the main body of the Workhouse for the temporary reception of cases of infirmity or sickness of a non-contagious character.

**13th February 1868**

The Chairman called the attention of the Board to the very high death rate in this union as compared with other places during the quarter ended 31st December last and an analysis was submitted of the deaths registered in

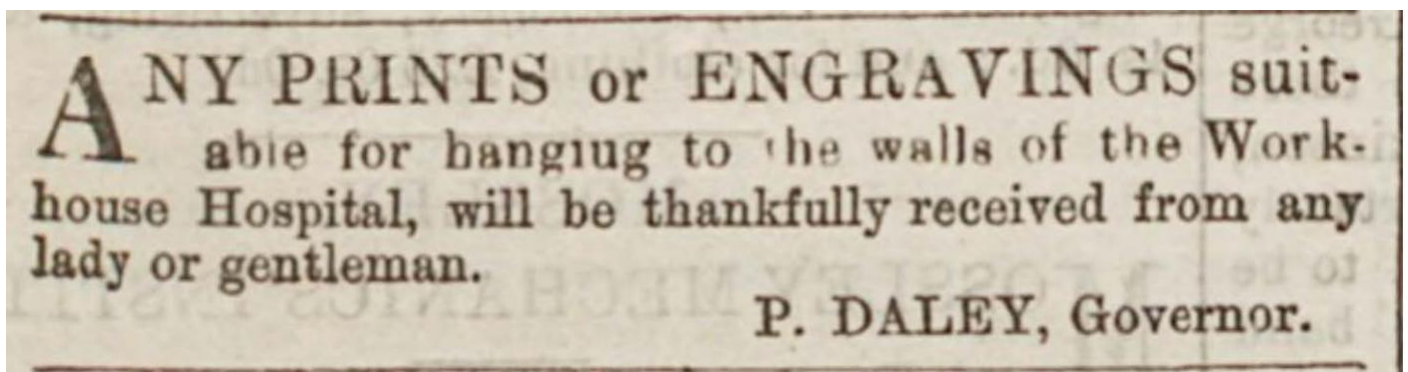
Ashton Town District which appeared the most excessive.

**22nd October 1868**

Another letter was received enclosing for the consideration of the Guardians a copy of the communication which the Board had received from Mr Wood the Medical Officer of the Workhouse respecting the case of Hannah Bowden an Inmate who was found dead in bed on the morning of the 29th and requesting to be informed whether Mr Wood was examined as a witness at the Inquest which was held in the case and whether the Guardians are satisfied with the verdict of the Jury. It was Agreed that the communication be referred to the Workhouse Committee for consideration and report.

**3rd June 1869**

A letter was received from Mr Wood Workhouse Medical Officer stating that as a new Dispensary is provided he hopes the Guardians will not object to supply their own stock bottles suitable for the room, and also Drugs, so that all dispensing may be promptly carried on at the Workhouse, the stock will thus remain the property of the Guardians should any change



ANY PRINTS or ENGRAVINGS suitable for hanging to the walls of the Workhouse Hospital, will be thankfully received from any lady or gentleman.  
P. DALEY, Governor.

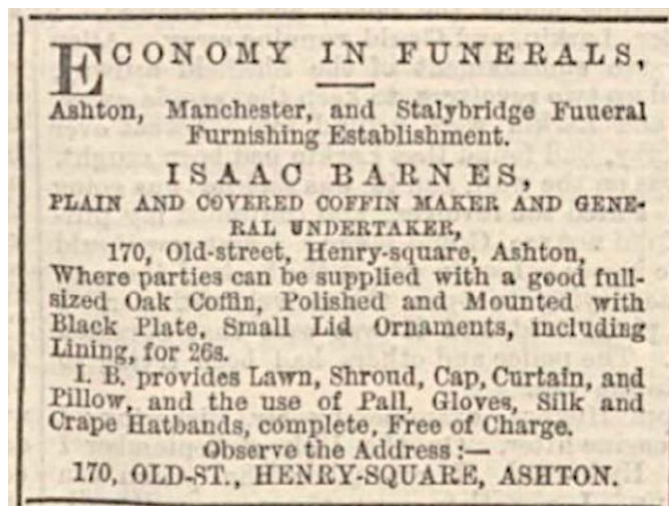
Advertisement requesting prints or engravings for the workhouse hospital, listed in the Ashton Reporter (6th February 1864).  
Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives



of Medical Officer occur. It was Agreed that the letter be referred to the Workhouse Committee for consideration and report.

## Death in the Workhouse

Victorian society was preoccupied with death. Life expectancy for many was short with disease rife in the overcrowded towns and cities. To pay for their funeral the working poor would often join a 'friendly' burial society, paying a small weekly sum. This would ensure that service and interment took place in an acceptable manner.



Advertisement for a local undertaker offering 'Economy in Funerals,' printed in the Ashton Reporter (2nd November 1867). Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

Paupers, however, fared very differently. To most Victorians, a pauper's funeral was the very worst fate that could befall a person, an indignity of the highest proportions. Poor Law Unions generally spent the bare minimum on such services, but nevertheless were also anxious to avoid adverse criticism from the press. Sometimes a pauper's family would pay for the funeral and the body would be transported in a Union hearse back to the parish for burial. If a pauper did not have any relatives, or family were unable to contribute, they would be buried in an unmarked grave, usually at the parish church, in the cheapest wooden coffin. In *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens gives an account of one such funeral for a poor woman conducted by the undertaker, Mr. Sowerberry, detailing a rushed ceremony, threadbare mourning garb and a delay filled by several boys playing amongst the tombstones:

*'So, they put the bier on the brink of the grave; and the two mourners waited patiently*

*in the damp clay, with a cold rain drizzling down, while the ragged boys whom the spectacle had attracted into the churchyard played a noisy game at hide-and-seek among the tombstones, or varied their amusements by jumping backwards and forwards over the coffin. Mr. Sowerberry and Bumble, being personal friends of the clerk, sat by the fire with him, and read the paper.*

*At length, after a lapse of something more than an hour, Mr. Bumble, and Sowerberry, and the clerk, were seen running towards the grave. Immediately afterwards, the clergyman appeared: putting on his surplice as he came along. Mr. Bumble then thrashed a boy or two, to keep up appearances; and the reverend gentleman, having read as much of the burial service as could be compressed into four minutes, gave his surplice to the clerk, and walked away again.*

*"Now, Bill!" said Sowerberry to the grave-digger. "Fill up!"*

### **27th May 1843, Manchester Courier**

On Monday evening an inquest was held at the Pitt and Nelson Inn, before Mr Rutter, Coroner, and a respectable jury, on the body of James Thompson, an inmate of the Ashton Workhouse. From the evidence adduced, it appeared the deceased had been in a weak state of mind for some time back, and during his rambling moments he would leave the workhouse and climb over buildings adjacent.— Mr Ousey, the governor of the workhouse, said that a chain had been fastened to his leg, to which was attached a large weight, to prevent him climbing; but the chain was taken off whenever he was found to be in a better state of mind. On Saturday evening the deceased went to bed about nine o'clock, but got up about twelve, and climbed over the buildings, into Mr Heap's yard....

An inmate of the workhouse said he went to the petty about half past five o'clock on Sunday morning and saw the deceased lying with his face in a pool of dirty water; he immediately obtained assistance and got him out, but he was quite dead. Deceased was 50 years of age. The jury gave a verdict of "Accidental death."

**27th January 1844, Manchester Courier**

Fatal Accident— On Saturday night week, as an old man, 75 years of age, named Newton, an inmate in the Ashton Workhouse, was coming from the Wesleyan Chapel, in crossing the road in Stamford Street, the omnibus running between Stalybridge and the railway ran over him, and broke one of his legs. The injury was of such a nature that amputation was found necessary. The poor old man was not able to sustain the shock, and gradually sunk till Saturday last, when he expired.

**24th February 1847, Manchester Courier**

The Ashton Workhouse – Some dispute having taken place relative to the power of the police in bringing a dead body to this workhouse, a communication has been forwarded to the poor-law commissioners upon the subject, by direction of the guardians of the Ashton Union, and the following is their reply:

Poor Law Commission Office,  
Somerset House 16th February, 1847

“Sir,— I am directed by the poor-law commissioners to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of 5th instant, and I am to state in reply, that the commissioners are not aware of an authority in law which justifies the constables, or any private individual, in bringing a dead body to the workhouse. That building is provided for the reception of the poor, who are admitted therein according to the regulations of the commissioners, or where no such regulations have been issued, according to the regulations of the Board of Guardians.... It would, doubtless be convenient, where there is proper accommodation in a workhouse, that unknown corpses found in any parish should be deposited therein, until they are identified, or until an inquest can be held; but this is clearly optional with the Board of Guardians.... The constable should have retained the custody of the corpse until the holding of the inquest, when the coroner would have directed the burying of it, and the guardians.... would have authorised a proper burial, unless prevented by the finding of the jury.— I am Sir, your most obedient servant

E Chadwick, Secretary

**20th July 1850, Manchester Times**

Barton-upon-Irwell Union

The clerk was directed to write to the Board of Guardians of the Ashton union with reference to the case of James Brittain, belonging to this union, who, it appeared, had died in the Ashton Workhouse in April last, and that no notice of his death had been forwarded either to the pauper's relatives or to the offices of this union. The board expressed their regret at such a circumstance, and the clerk was directed to ask for the observations of the Ashton Board on the matter.

**25th July 1855, Liverpool Daily Post**

Charles Robinson, a lad nine years of age, a pauper in the Ashton-under-Lyne Workhouse was killed on Saturday, by a blow of a stone, inflicted by another pauper boy. The boys had been throwing stones at one another, and a coroner's jury found a verdict of 'Death by misadventure.'

**5th December 1857, Manchester Courier**

Suicide – An inquest was held at the house of Mr Firth Garside, Seven Stars, Hurst Brooks, on Wednesday, before Mr Rutter, coroner, upon the body of Mr John Hall, 30 years of age. It appeared from the statement of his wife that the deceased was in a state of great distress, owing to his being out of employment, that the family was in a state of utter destitution, all that they had coming in to support himself, a wife and four children, being a shilling a day, which he earned by picking oakum at the workhouse, this preyed on his mind so much, that on Monday, during the absence of his family, he hung himself. A verdict of “Temporary insanity” was returned.

**12th December 1857, Ashton Reporter**

Singular Funeral – On Thursday last, the very uncommon occurrence of the burial of a man and his wife at the same time took place. The man, who had been an inmate of the Ashton Workhouse about eight months died on Saturday the 6th instant. He was a native of Mossley, and his name is Samuel Taylor, but better known by the title of Lord Teacake. His wife who had been an inmate of the same workhouse about three weeks prior to his decease, died on Wednesday and their interment took place the following day in Mossley churchyard. Their united ages amounted to 156 years, his being 82 and her 74.

**14th April 1860, Ashton Reporter**

THE PARISH CHURCH CEMETERY.— We wish to call the attention of those in authority at the Cemetery to the fact that graves in the paupers' burial ground are not filled up. We visited the place on Thursday, and found that two graves had been left open, and had apparently been so for several days. The coffins were almost bare, and in one grave the depth of water was over a foot, while in the other it was about six inches.

**4th August 1860, Ashton Reporter**

The Rev. Mr. ATLIFF rose to address the audience, and was received with loud applause. ... He said.... They frequently saw old people carried off the workhouse, or the bastille as it was sometimes called. He would rather see an old person comfortable in a workhouse than miserable out of one; but so long as the children lived, give the old people a comfortable, happy home, and save them from parish relief and a pauper's funeral.

**16th April 1867**

Resolved that the offer of Mr John Sykes of Dukinfield to undertake the Hearse Hire for the conveyance of corpses from the Workhouse in Ashton for six shillings, to the new Cemetery in Dukinfield [*established in 1866*] for seven shillings each journey to be accepted, and that in the cases of Out Poor the Relieving Officers be authorised to give the order to the most convenient Hearse Proprietor who will do the work on the same terms.

**13th February 1858, Ashton Reporter**

About ten o'clock on Thursday morning the

**11th December 1858,  
Illustrated London News**

Last week a new room was opened to the public in the British Museum, containing an extremely interesting collection of foreign plants and seeds – sections of the trunks of trees, showing their structure, and specimens of woods, British and foreign, polished and unpolished. These objects represent, principally, the vegetation of southern climates.

body of a man, named Joseph De Benskey, a Pole, who had left the Ashton Workhouse about a fortnight ago, was found in a dry drain in an apparently famished state. The body was conveyed to the New Inn, Mossley road, where the inquest was held yesterday, and afterwards by adjournment at the Bowling Green Inn, when a verdict of "Found Dead" was returned.

**15th August 1868, Ashton Reporter**  
PAUPER FUNERALS

Mr. MATLEY, on the reading of the Workhouse Committee's minutes, remarked upon what appeared to him a heavy charge for hearses at pauper funerals in the new cemetery.— Mr. GARSIDE assured him this question had been fully settled, and it was generally felt that the board ought to allow the friends of the deceased the option of having them interred in which place they chose.— Mr. COOKE coincided with the last speaker, and said it was the least they could do for the poor people at such a time.— Mr. GARSIDE also stated that the hearses had been tendered for, and the lowest tender taken.— The Rev. C. H. LOMAX thought this question had been so fully discussed that it ought not to be re-opened. He should deeply regret that any person should be interred in a place contrary to the wishes of his friends, no matter which sect the person belonged to....

**19th June 1869, Ashton Reporter**

A woman burnt to death at Newton On Monday afternoon a woman named Catherine Tinskey residing in Newton, near Hyde, met with an awful death under the following circumstances. It appears that about two o'clock in the afternoon, the deceased who is a woman about 46 years of age and was deserted by her husband some years ago, was seen going into her house with some bread in her apron, sometime after she came rushing out of the door in flames, gesticulating wildly. A stiff breeze blowing at the time, the fire was fanned into a great blaze, and she was seen enveloped in a sheet of fire. She sunk to the ground, and before assistance could arrive she was shockingly burnt.... she was fearfully scorched about the breast and in other parts of the body, and was conveyed to Ashton Workhouse, where she died the following morning, after suffering the most acute agony. A verdict of 'Accidental Death' was returned.



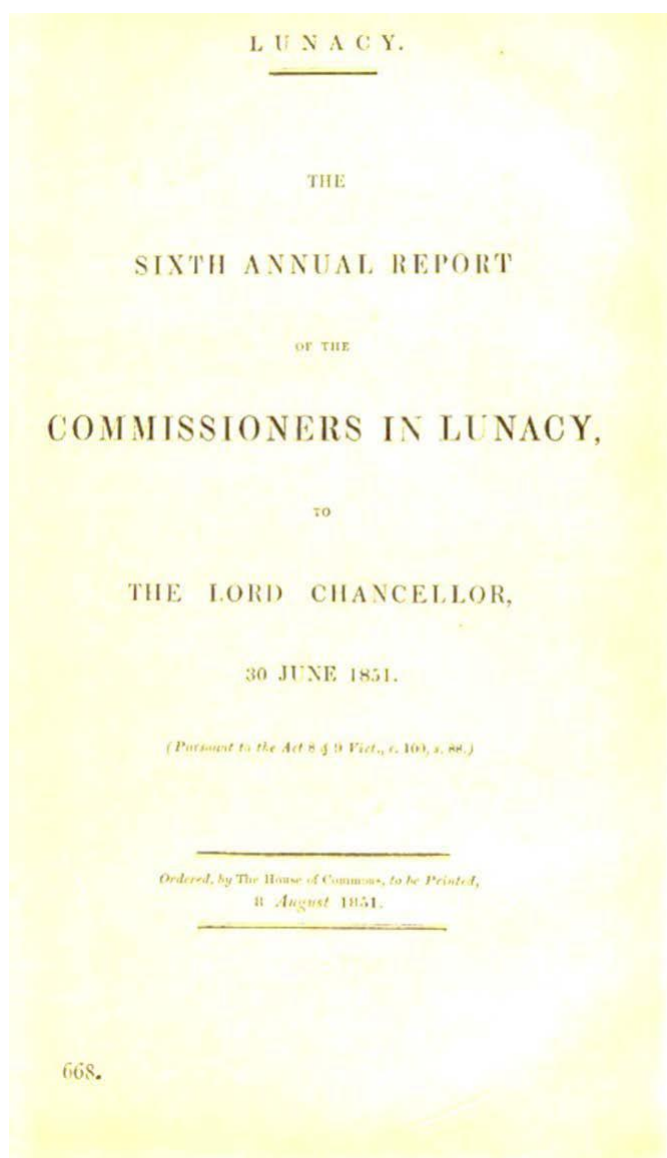
# Of Unsound Mind

Attitudes towards mental illness in the Victorian period are thankfully unrecognisable in today's society.

Inmates suffering from psychological difficulties were termed 'lunatic' or 'insane.' If considered to be harmless to themselves and others, they were treated in the same way as adult paupers, deemed capable of labour and expected to contribute to the running of the workhouse. Sadly, many of them spent the majority of their life in this latter institution, as they had nobody to provide care for them on the outside. Another category of inmates – those referred to as 'mental defectives' – were individuals with learning disabilities who, at that time, were categorised as 'idiots' or imbeciles.' Those with a milder degree of impairment were labelled 'feeble-minded.' By 1837 more than 8000 'idiots' and 'lunatics' were under the care of the Union workhouses.

A much more serious problem for the authorities was the management of paupers with violent tendencies, including those in the grip of serious mental illness such as schizophrenia and psychosis. As these individuals were very difficult to maintain in the workhouse, a considerable number were subsequently transferred to county asylums, despite the reluctance of the guardians in light of the cost implication. Indeed, the 1845 Lunatics Act formally specified that such dangerous 'lunatics' be removed from the workhouse to such establishments after fourteen days. It is clear therefore that asylums were intended to serve as a key part of the system overseeing the poor. Children suffering from mental health problems, however, remained without official provision, with many of these institutions reluctant to admit younger people.

As a result of the above legislation, the government established a public body known as the 'Commissioners in Lunacy,' whose brief was to superintend the provision of asylum accommodation for 'lunatics,' in addition to their discharge if appropriate, whilst overseeing their transfer from the workhouse and receipt of outdoor relief. The conditions of 'lunatics' and 'imbeciles' under the aegis of indoor relief were



Front cover of *The Sixth Annual Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy*, published in 1851. Credit: Wellcome Collection

also kept under observation. Simultaneously, the Commissioners in Lunacy also performed the fundamental task of collecting and analysing data on the 'lunatics' and returning these statistics to the Poor Law Board.

Within the workhouse itself, the pauper 'lunatics' were either confined to a dedicated ward or dispersed amongst the adult paupers. Treatment was primitive with the frequent use of straitjackets as a means of restraint, together with the use of padded cells and solitary confinement.

As the nineteenth century progressed, mental health care was gradually consolidated into a public system reliant upon institutionalisation. Yet many of the mentally ill were still admitted to workhouses or prisons, as certain areas were slow to embrace the model of the county asylum. There were few improvements in



treatment and conditions and the lives of those designated 'insane' were largely characterised by suffering.

**29th April 1864,  
The Lincoln,  
Rutland and Stamford Mercury**

The gold medal established by the Society of Arts, in memory of their late president, the prince consort, and called the "Albert Medal," to be awarded from time to time "for distinguished merit in promoting arts, manufactures, or commerce" has been awarded to Sir Roland Hill, K.C.B, in respect of his eminent services in the creation of the penny postage & other postal reforms.

**4th April 1840, The Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser**

VIOLENT LUNATIC.— On Thursday night week, one of the police watchmen took up a man almost starved to death in the street: he had walked till his strength was completely exhausted. He stated that the constables were in pursuit of him from Ashton, but they could not catch him. The watchman took him to the Station-house when the deportment of the man evinced that he was of unsound mind. In the morning he was set at liberty, and during the forenoon he made an attempt to hang himself on a tree near the canal, Oldham Road; but being seen, he was cut down, when he immediately ran and threw himself in the canal, but was drawn out again before he was dead and taken to the Police Station, where he got his clothes changed, and some necessaries of refreshment given him. At night a man was set to watch over him, and in the middle of the night he set upon him by surprise, and almost strangled the man. He left him for dead, and got out of the place; but the man coming to himself, he gave an alarm, when assistance was procured, and they put the lunatic into a cell, where he remained until the parish authorities took him to Ashton workhouse, and where he has three children. His name is James Bracebuckle, and he is a widower with five children.

**23rd July 1846**

The Master of the Workhouse having reported the state of 2 lunatics who he considers dangerous and the clerk having written to the Asylum Lancaster desiring they might be admitted there and had a reply that it was quite full. The clerk will write to the Commissioners and ask for their advice upon the subject.

**6th August 1846**

Mr Baker the Governor of the Workhouse be empowered and directed to take a cottage as soon as possible for the reception of pauper lunatics and the clerk write to the Chester lunatic asylum and enquire if there be any room and what is the cost per head.

**22nd August 1846, Manchester Courier**

LUNACY.— The officers in connection with the parish Ashton-under-Lyne have for some time past been greatly inconvenienced, owing to the want of accommodation for lunatics. Latterly several orders have been obtained from the magistrates for the admission of lunatics to the asylums; but which have been of no avail, in consequence of their being full. At the present time there are five in the Ashton Workhouse which terrify the inmates, besides others who are at liberty with their friends. It is expected by the officers that serious consequences will ensue ere long, unless some provision be made for these unfortunate persons.

**4th February 1847**

The Commissioner desires to call the attention of the Guardians to the cases of Ann Bradbury, Abraham Fielding and Thomas Hall who are described as Lunatics or Idiots 'maintained in the Unions Workhouse and Dangerous to themselves or others.' The Commissioners think it necessary to point out to the Guardians that it is enacted by section 45 of the Act 4 & 5 W 4 C 76 [*Poor Law Amendment Act*] that nothing in this Act shall authorise the detention in any workhouse of any dangerous lunatic, insane, person or idiot for any longer period than 14 days and every person wilfully detaining in any workhouse any such lunatic, insane person or idiot shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanour. The Commissioner wishes to know if any steps have been taken by the Guardians for the removal of the above mentioned persons to an Asylum.

**24th April 1847, Manchester Guardian**

Superintendent of County police James Cromie King visited the Board of Guardians to report a female lunatic had been refused entry into the house on Friday night. One of his men had found the female wandering the streets and taken her to the Workhouse. She was refused entry by the matron who used abusive language towards the man, who had to take her to Denton Police station.

**9th May 1848**

A letter from Mr Robert Wood Chairman of the Workhouse Committee was read.

The Workhouse at all times contains a number of Inmates of unsound mind and presents many varieties of aberration of intellect, from some of whom under excitement however trifling, violence of a various nature might occur to the other inmates. I shall be glad to be informed by the committee what course I am to adopt in these cases, the house affords no lunatic ward nor accommodation of any sort for cases of this description.

Mr Thomas Mellor gave notice that he would at the next meeting move that it is necessary and expedient to reduce the number of inmates in the House to make room for persons of unsound mind (at the next meeting the matter was postponed).

**13th January 1849, Manchester Guardian**

It appeared that Harriet Ashton had again made an application for a portion of bedding and to be allowed to leave the house. The committee however refused to act as they had referred the matter to the relief committee the week previous. It also appeared from the diary of Mr Wood the surgeon that he wished some lunatic paupers to be removed. It was explained that the cause of these cases being kept in the workhouse was the want of room at the asylum.

**13th February 1851**

A letter from the Poor Law Board read the annual return of lunatics sent from this Union, wherein the following persons were returned as Lunatics in the workhouse and hospital dangerous to themselves or others – Hannah Buckley, Thomas Kelly 6yrs, Abraham Fielding, Ann Bredbury, Richard Allsop and Elizabeth Newton.

**30th August 1851, Manchester Courier**

**DISAPPEARANCE OF AN AGED FEMALE.–**

On the 14th ult., about four o'clock in the afternoon, a female, 66 years of age, named Ann Cunliffe, left a friend's house in Stalybridge, for the purpose of proceeding to the Ashton union workhouse, for which place she had an order, but she has never been seen or heard of since, although every inquiry

Name	Idiot	Insane	Imbecile	Epileptic	Propensity
Joseph Wilshaw		x			Ashton-under-Lyne
Henry North		x			Ashton-under-Lyne
James McCane			x		Ashton-under-Lyne
John Hellowell	x				Ashton-under-Lyne
James Ridgway		x			Ashton-under-Lyne
James Booth				x	Ashton-under-Lyne
Abraham Fielding				x	Ashton-under-Lyne
Abraham Garside			x		Ashton-under-Lyne
Joseph Ingham				x	Ashton-under-Lyne
Ann Stansfield				x	Ashton-under-Lyne
Prudence Wilde				x	Newton
Sarah Withington		x			Haughton
Ann Bradbury		x			Mottram
Ann Haughton		x			Mottram
Marian Bennett	x				Mottram

has been made by her son, who resides in Ashton. It appears that she has been subject to aberration of mind occasionally, and fears are entertained that she has destroyed herself, for at the time she left, a dreadful storm of thunder was raging, and was very likely to have a powerful influence on her mind.

**7th February 1852, Manchester Courier**

From the workhouse committee's report, it appears that three persons sent to the Lancaster Asylum some time ago in a state of insanity, have been fetched back to the workhouse, owing to their being considered harmless.

**22nd April 1854, Manchester Guardian**

[The] Board of Guardians chairman called the workhouse committee's attention to the fact that the asylum was very full, and that many idiots were there that the law would allow to be kept at the workhouse, if proper accommodation was provided – The committee promised to consider the subject.

**7th January 1865,  
Cambrian News**

Glasgow, we may now observe, is the largest city in the empire. The municipality of London has not more than a third of its extent or its population. The City of Westminster is not above half its size; and until the various burghs comprising that huge metropolis are united into one, Glasgow will remain the largest city, legally so called in Great Britain.

**27th May 1854, Manchester Courier**

Board of Guardians – .... A lunatic in The House had jumped a distance of seven yards through a closet window, and run a considerable distance, in a state of nudity, before he was captured.

A communication received from the Bolton Union stated that a lunatic had been received into the workhouse there having on the Ashton Union dress, and desired that he be looked after before the 29th inst.; failing that he would be sent to the asylum, and charged to the Ashton Union. The Chairman

thought it a very unusual course to send for paupers to another union; but after some discussion, It was Agreed that the governor of the workhouse should attend to the case.

**10th August 1854**

Letter from Cheshire County Asylum J E Edwards Clerk

I beg to inform you that at a meeting of the Visiting Justices of the asylum held on the 18th Ultimo, it was ordered that the clothes of all pauper lunatics admitted into the asylum be returned by the officer bringing the patient and in the event of his refusing to take them that they be forwarded (carriage unpaid) to the Workhouse Authorities.

This arrangement has been adopted (amongst other reasons) in consequence of the very limited space for such purposes in the asylum and is adopted and carried out by the asylum in Lancashire.

I have no doubt you are aware that the Relieving Officer who brings the patients has refused to take the clothes and a parcel forwarded by the Superintendent in accordance with the forgoing resolution has been returned again to the railway station, Chester.

I should therefore feel obliged if you would lay the matter before your Board of Guardians at the next meeting and I shall be glad to hear that there is no real difficulty in carrying out the wishes of the Visiting Justices.

It was Resolved that the Clerk be instructed to acknowledge the receipt of the letter and to state that the Guardians are of the opinion that provision ought to be made at the asylum for storing the clothing belonging to the patients so long as they remain there; that they have several reasons for coming to this conclusion:—

In the first place where a party is removed from this, but having a settlement in some other union at a considerable distance (which is frequently the case) and in course of time an order is taken out upon the settled parish and the patient is removed there or to some asylum in the neighbourhood it would be certainly inconvenient if the clothing were at Ashton and the patient at Chester and the

clothing had to be fetched as others provided, before the removal could take place.

That the Guardians consider it unreasonable to require the removal officer to bring back the clothing which is often very far from clean if not absolutely filthy, to say nothing of this respectability.

That the visiting justices must have been misinformed as to this arrangement being carried out by the asylum in Lancashire, inasmuch as the other relieving officers of this union who remove pauper patients to the Prestwich Asylum are never called upon to return the clothing.

### **27th November 1857**

Mr Dean stated to the Board that the Workhouse Committee after much consideration felt convinced of the necessity there is, for having a small padded room in the hospital available for the reception of violent cases of insanity that may be temporarily detained there, and have agreed to recommend to the Board that there is one to be fitted up in the corner of one of the large sleeping rooms, the probable cost of which would be £22 and it was approved unanimously that the Workhouse Committee be empowered to make and fit up a padded room in the hospital...

### **26th March 1859, Manchester Courier**

**COST OF LUNATICS.**— At the Ashton Board of Guardians on Thursday, A. B. Wimpenny, Esq., in the chair, it was resolved to send for two women from the Lancaster Asylum, named Alice Seville and Mary Ann Stopford, who have been in the asylum, one upwards of twenty years, and the other seventeen years, and have cost the union nearly £800. The women are to be cared for in the Ashton workhouse.

### **16th April 1859, Ashton Reporter**

The Chairman, in alluding to the growing number of imbeciles in their charge, nearly 80, said he understood one of them had escaped in the course of the last few days. A man named McCullagh had escaped through one of the windows and although a person answering the description of the lunatic had been seen near Droylsden, nothing more had been heard of him by the Workhouse Committee. The Chairman hoped that that every precaution would be taken to prevent the recurrence of such doings...

### **17th September 1859, Ashton Reporter**

The chairman said that an inmate of the Chester Asylum named Sarah Chadwick, was now so far manageable she should be brought to the workhouse. She was very clever with her needle, and might be useful in making clothes. She was well connected, and was a woman of superior education. It was accordingly determined to make the usual application for her return.— The chairman said he was sorry there was not a greater attendance of guardians that morning, as he wished to bring forward a motion as to the propriety of visiting at stated periods the various asylums used by the Ashton Union, but thought it best to reserve the point until there was a better attendance.

### **18th February 1860, Ashton Reporter**

The arrangements for the reception and accommodation of lunatics have been further extended by the completion of two padded rooms.

### **12th May 1860, Ashton Reporter**

Ashton Board of Guardians – Lunatic paupers

Mr Mellor said he had a matter before that board that was with reference to the number of inmates in the hospital and poorhouse at present who were insane, idiotic or epileptic. The attentions requisite to keep order and the surveillance to keep them in subjection were really beyond the amount of paid services which they had to command and some steps would have to be taken either to remove away from the poorhouse a large proportion of them or provision must be made to meet the increasing requirements of the case. They had two very violent females, one from Stalybridge and the other from Ashton.... It seemed impossible to keep them in subjection or keep them from injuring themselves and it became necessary to have them removed at once.

The Chairman said he had been informed that it (Poor Law Board) was again in contemplation to enlarge the Chester County Lunatic Asylum and several other Unions were intending to oppose any further outlay at Chester and if possible, to secure the erection of another asylum more convenient to the Unions in this part of the County. After some conversation upon the subject, It was Moved by the Chairman, Seconded by Mr Hartley and unanimously Resolved that a memorial under the seal of the Board be sent to the County Magistrates at



(173)

Also the following Lunatic Accounts

Lancaster Lunatic Asylum	139 17 8	Debit Ashton	86 16 0
		" Droyliden	31 17 0
		" Haughton	21 4 8
	<u>£ 139 17 8</u>		<u>£ 139 17 8</u>
Chester Lunatic Asylum	73 19 0	Debit Dukinfield	36 7 0
		" Godley	6 5 2
		" Muttonsley	6 2 2
		" Nollingworth	3 0 0
		" Nottham	12 16 11
		" Newton	5 11 2
		" Payley	3 16 7
	<u>£ 213 16 8</u>		<u>£ 213 16 8</u>

Minutes of the Ashton Union Board of Guardians recording the 'lunatic accounts.' Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

Knutsford in favour of the erection of another County Asylum accessible at less cost to this and neighbouring Unions, and involving less hardship to patients and their friends.

**7th September 1861, Ashton Weekly News**

The Clerk read a letter from the Poor Law Board enclosing communication from Mr Rountree, a gentleman who visits Union Workhouses and who stated that a lunatic female, who had refused to take any substance for fourteen days had not received such treatment as was usually observed in lunatic asylums in similar cases. Mr Dean said she was completely emaciated and bed ridden and that the medical officer and nurses had paid her necessary attention. The clerk was instructed to communicate with the Poor Law Board to explain the particulars of the case.

## 1861 Workhouse Survey of Long-term Inmates for Ashton-under-Lyne

Name of adult pauper inmate of workhouse for five years or more	Time spent in workhouse		Reason pauper unable to sustain themselves	Whether pauper was brought up in district or workhouse school
	Years	months		
Mary Heap	11		Paralysis	
Ann Higginbottom	12		Imbecility	
Henry North	8		Insanity	
Ann Smith	11		Disabled through rheumatism	
Ann Wright	12		Imbecility	
Ann Winterbottom	12		Imbecility	
Robert Woodcock	11	6	Old age and debility	
William Brierley	8		Idiocy	
Eliza Mallinson	7	6	Epilepsy	Yes
Mary McDonald	6	6	Imbecility and blindness	
James Whitworth	6		Old age and defective sight	
William Taylor	5	6	Old and infirmity	
Mary Casey	5	5	Paralysis	
Sarah Brierley	5	4	Epilepsy	
James Buckley	5	3	Insanity and blindness	
Thomas Rowland	11	6	Old age and infirmity	
John Howarth	5	5	Old age and infirmity	
Abraham Garside	12		Imbecility	
James Ridgway	12		Imbecility	
Mary Bridge	8		Old age and Infirmary	
Martha Charlesworth	11	6	Crippled and defective sight	Yes
Ann Haughton	12		Insanity	
Hannah Clough	5	6	Epilepsy	
Abel Martin Elliott	5	6	Idiocy	
Sarah Burgoyne	5	5	Insanity	
James Nield	5	5	Insanity	
William Robinson	11		Imbecility	
Thomas Steel	10		Crippled	Yes
Ann Stanfield	7		Paralysis	
Peter Winterbottom	5	6	Idiocy and crippled	
Sarah Marsland	5	4	Three illegitimate children	
William Harrison	11		Old age and infirmity	
Peter Pearson	9		Paralysis agitans	
Charles Jackson	9		Deaf, dumb and blind	
John Jackson	9		Deaf, dumb, defective sight	
James Jackson	9		Deaf, dumb, defective sight	
Mary Jackson	8		Deaf, dumb, defective sight	
Thomas Jackson	8		Imbecility	
Betty Thorpe	7	6	Old age and infirmity	

Ann Whitworth	7	6	Old age and infirmity	
George Goodwin	6	6	Insanity	
Elizabeth Holt	8		Maimed	
William Henry Briscoe	8		Epilepsy	
William Hindley	6		Old age and infirmity	
Alice Gregson	5	6	Widow with three children	
Mary Thornley	5	3	Epilepsy	
Hannah Day	5	3	Epilepsy	

*In 1861 the government requested a survey of workhouse inmates who had been resident longer than five years. In Ashton there were forty-seven such individuals said to be suffering from 'imbecility,' seven of whom had been resident since 1849.*

*Of the forty-seven inmates resident for more than five years, ten suffered from 'old age and infirmity' or 'old age and debility;' one 'old age and defective sight;' eight 'imbecility;' six 'epilepsy;' five 'insanity;' four 'paralysis;' one 'deaf, dumb and blind;' three 'deaf, dumb, defective sight;' two 'disability;' one 'idiocy;' two 'imbecility' or 'insanity and blindness;' one 'maimed;' one 'crippled with sight deficiency;' one 'idiocy and crippled;' and one 'disabled through rheumatism.' Two women are included in the list by virtue of their marital and familial status alone: one a 'widow with three children,' the other a woman with 'three illegitimate children.'*

*Research into the seven inmates occupying the workhouse for twelve years shows that Abraham Garside spent the rest of his life there and died in 1906 aged 75 years.*

#### **28th August 1864**

Notice was received from the Prestwich Asylum of 5 patients belonging to this Union and their removal to the workhouse.

#### **31st August 1865**

Robert Navine Esq., a Commissioner in Lunacy visited the workhouse on the 25th inst. and examined the inmates classed as lunatics and also the rooms and beds they occupy and reported the house clean and in a satisfactory state.

#### **29th March 1866**

A letter was received from the Chester Lunatic Asylum intimating that the rate of maintenance of pauper lunatics will be increased from 8 shillings 2d to 8 shillings 9d per week from 1st April 1866.

#### **5th April 1866**

A circular letter was read from the Guardians of the Sudbury Union requesting the Board to cooperate with them in calling the attention of the government to the necessity that exists for provision being made for care and treatment of pauper idiots in other public establishments than lunatic asylums and It was Resolved that the clerk be instructed to state in reply that the Guardians retain in the workhouse as many as possible of this class of cases referred to.

#### **31st May 1866**

The Revd C.W. Lomax reported upon the visit of the Deputation to the Chester Asylum on Monday last and stated that there were only six cases viz John James Ogden, Hannah Kirk, Ellen Clarke, Ellen Griffin, Samuel Bromley and James Barnes, that appeared to the Deputation in a fit state to be discharged...

#### **21st June 1866**

A letter was read from Dr Harper, the superintendent of the Chester Asylum stating that there is only one case out of the six brought under his notice by the Guardians whose removal he could at present recommend. Ellen Griffin he states has materially improved of late and unless she should experience a relapse she may be sufficiently recovered to be discharged at the next meeting of the Visiting Justice.

### ***25th April 1858, Illustrated London News***

On Thursday, Mr. Redgrave, R.A., presided at a meeting for the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, when some drawings and sketches by John Constable, R.A., never before seen in public, were exhibited. There was a large attendance of artists, connoisseurs, members and their friends. A paper was read by Mr. T.R.S. Temple on the life and genius of the great English landscape-painter, which led to considerable discussion.

#### ***7th July 1866, Ashton Reporter***

The Chairman (Mr Bradbury) reported that he in company with Messrs. Marler, Hartley, and the Clerk, had visited Prestwich Asylum to inspect the lunatics from the Ashton Union. He reported that there were 37 idiots from this union in the asylum, and the deputation thought that about nine of the patients were improving. The board, therefore, decided to ask for the removal of those nine individuals to the Ashton Workhouse. These most unfortunate people are, in some cases, in a sad condition, some of them being sane at times, and repenting their condition, whilst at other times their mania becomes most active, and they are very dangerous.... One imagines himself to be the owner of the whole asylum, and told the doctors and the deputation that they were only his servants. Another, whilst one of the servants was proceeding to give him a bath, put the bath man into the tub, and if he could have turned the water on would have drowned him.... The cost of keeping these idiots is 9s 4d a head per week, most of which has to be paid by the Union, and a similar amount is now demanded by the authorities of the Chester Asylum.

#### ***19th July 1866***

A letter was received from the Superintendent of the Prestwich Asylum recommending the removal of Robert Dobie, John Smith, Samuel Jackson.... to the workhouse of this union but making no report upon six other cases the Deputation considered fit to be transferred and some dissatisfaction was expressed at the disposition to retain in the asylum cases that can be made useful and discharging only the most troublesome.

#### ***16th August 1866***

A letter was received from the Poor Law Board enclosing a copy of a report made by the Commissioner in Lunacy as to the condition in which he found the wards and the lunatic and imbecile inmates at the Workhouse on the occasion of his visit on the 26th.

#### ***15th November 1866***

The twentieth report of the Commissioners for Lunacy was laid before the meeting from which it appeared that the average weekly cost of pauper lunatics at the four asylums where the patients chargeable to this Union are sent will bear a favourable comparison with the average cost of pauper patients in the different public asylums throughout the country.

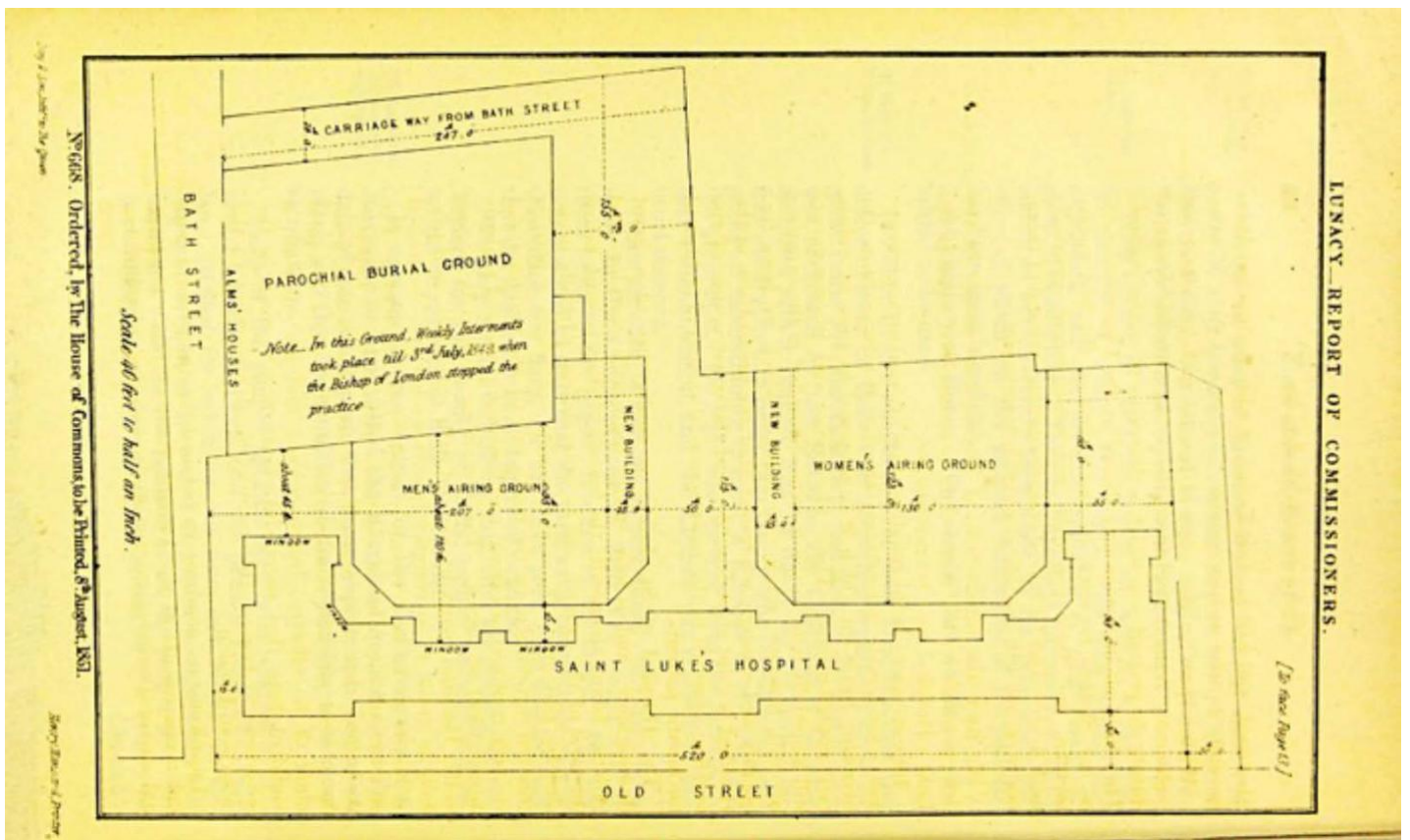
#### ***18th December 1866, Manchester Guardian***

The Insane Poor of England and Wales The recent issue by the Poor-Law Board of the yearly statement of the number of insane paupers chargeable to the unions and parishes of England and Wales is the latest census of that most hapless section of the community. The care of the insane poor throws great responsibility and no inconsiderable expense upon the municipal administration of this country.

It is with the poor, not the private patients that we are here concerned; and they amounted to 41,425, of whom 18,209 were males and 23,216 females.

If a lunatic has no settlement, or if his settlement could not be ascertained, then the charge for his maintenance might 'be transferred to the county in which he was found'....





Plan of St. Luke's Hospital for Lunatics with ordered improvements. Taken from 'The Sixth Annual Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy,' published in 1851. Credit: Wellcome Collection

It is noticeable that the proportion of insane females is greatly in excess of the males in unions and parishes and but moderately so in the counties and boroughs. The lunatics chargeable to the latter jurisdictions are, we believe, mostly persons found wandering about the country, or the towns, and that may account for the smaller ratio of females, males as a rule, being more addicted to vagrant habits than females.

Nearly 1,000 included in the 41,425 insane as stated above were criminal lunatics – 759 men and 239 women. A large number of soldiers and sailors are confined as criminal lunatics.

### 11th May 1867, Ashton Reporter

The Workhouse Barbers

Mr. Cooke asked whether or not the two barber inmates of the workhouse could not shave the inmates instead of paying people to do it – Mr. Booth: We have mentioned the matter to Mr. Daley, the Governor of the workhouse but he dare not trust the inmate barbers, who are imbeciles – Mr. Hall: I should not like them to shave me (Hear, hear). The Chairman: Perhaps Mr. Cooke would like Ripley (one of the inmate barbers) to shave him first – (laughter). If any accident happens we will be blamed for it.

Mr. Cooke: I was not aware of his condition when I mentioned it.

### 7th January 1865, Cambrian News

In the general dearth of news it may perhaps interest our readers to state that green peas were picked, and new potatoes dug, at Ventnor, in the Isle of Wight, on Christmas Eve. These vegetables we are told, were obtained from an open garden, and the writer of the letter containing the information adds:— "We also still gather in many quite unprotected gardens, roses, violets, primroses, mignonettes, heliotrope, verbena, single and double walls, single and double stocks, geraniums, petunia, veronica, .... &c., and the usual variety of fall and winter flowers."

### 7th September 1867, Ashton Reporter

The Lunatics and Idiots at the Workhouse A copy of a report by Mr Wilkes, one of the visiting commissioners in lunacy, upon

his visit to Ashton Workhouse, was read, from which it appeared there were 180 lunatics and imbeciles in the workhouse.... many were cases of melancholia, some of a suicidal tendency, some were very excitable, and, others were very troublesome through having made frequent, and in some cases, successful attempts to escape. One woman (Ann Barker) was in a room on the occasion of his visit in a state of mania. The commissioner recommended this woman and several others to be sent at once to the county asylum. The new hospital would accommodate 100 insane persons, and on its completion the old asylum would be given up to the use of females. The commissioner complained that the clothes of some of the inmates were untidy and much worn; and the arrangements of the present asylum were very defective. The day-room had a bare, cheerless appearance and was too overcrowded. Drafts, dominoes and newspapers were said to be provided for the inmates but he could not see many about. He recommended that the men should be employed to work on the grounds. He also hoped that a more liberal diet would benefit the sane and idiotic...

### **30th July 1868**

A letter was received from the Clerk to the Visiting Justices of the Chester Asylum ordering the removal of Thomas Tideswell on trial and John James Ogden and John Booth as cured.

### **13th August 1868**

A letter was received from the Poor Law Board enclosing a copy of a communication from the Commissioners in Lunacy having special reference to the opinion of our Workhouse Medical Officer upon Mr Forster's recommendation of a special dietary for the insane in the Workhouse on a more liberal scale and containing a larger amount of animal food. It was Agreed that the letter be referred to the Workhouse Committee for consideration.

### **27th August 1868**

A letter was also read from Mr Wood, the Workhouse Medical Officer to the dietary of the Insane Inmates of the Workhouse, which had been animadverted upon rather strongly by the Commissioners in Lunacy, stating that the opinion he had previously expressed was not changed, but as an alteration is suggested

he would recommend that the class of inmates in question would be allowed the generous diet given to special cases in the Hospital. It was Resolved that Mr Wood's recommendation be adopted.

### **13th May 1869**

Mr Lane then introduced the question of diet.... for the Lunatics and Imbecile cases at our Workhouse which had been commented upon recently by the Commissioners in Lunacy and, on the Inspector's suggestion, It was Agreed that he be instructed to add to the Board's reply 'that the Medical Officer had been reminded of his power to change the diet in accordance with the particular necessities of each case'. The Inspector also wished to ascertain more definitely the fitness of the Male Nurse Reynolds for the situation he holds and after some conversation he promised to recommend the Poor Law Board to allow the question to stand over until the 24th.... at which time he hoped the Guardians would be able to give a satisfactory answer to the question.

### **17th June 1869**

It was Agreed that the Clerk be instructed to request Mr Coulthart to bring the cases of William Cropper, George Oldfield, James Gee, William Parkinson and Maria Walmsley especially under the notice of the Committee of Visitors at their next meeting with a view to their removal to our Workhouse if not dangerous to themselves or others.

### **24th June 1869**

A letter was received from Mr Hulton the Clerk to the Visiting Justices of the Prestwich Asylum stating that William Parkinson and Maria Walmsley might be removed to the Workhouse and Mr Holland had been requested to consider the other cases applied for by the Guardians and to report respecting them to the Committee at their next meeting.

### **12th August 1869**

A letter was received from Dr Davidson Superintendent of the Chester Asylum stating that he shall have much pleasure in discharging the 4 patients applied for when he considers them in a fit state to leave the Asylum, but that at present there is no particular change to report in their mental or bodily condition.

— Frame-maker	..	..	34
Loom-maker	..	..	18
Lumper, hobler	..	..	91
Lunatic of no stated occupa- tion	..	..	9050
Maccaroni—dealer, manufac- ture	..	..	6

Entry from 'The Occupations of the People in Great Britain and the Islands in the British Seas, in 1851.' Illustrated London News. Credit: Manchester Archives+

### **30th September 1869**

An Order of Maintenance was received from the Leeds Union in the case of a pauper lunatic named James Howard, settlement Denton, but as the Order charged this Union 15 shillings per week towards the cost of maintenance from the 1st of July last Mr Beeley was instructed to consult Mr Taylor solicitor as to whether the Guardians would not be justified in resisting the excessive charge prior to the order being taken out.

**22nd January 1859,  
Woolmer's Exeter and  
Plymouth Gazette**

According to a recent return of the Registrar-General, 28 or 29 per cent of all the men married in England and Wales in 1857 were unable to sign their own name.

### **21st October 1869**

Mr Lane then introduced the question of dietary for the lunatics in the Workhouse and after some discussion It was Moved by the Revd C. W. Lomax and Seconded by Mr Cook that the No 2 Hospital Diet be the standard dietary for the lunatics subject to such alterations in particular cases as the Workhouse Medical Officer may think fit, as decided upon by the Guardians in August 1868. This arrangement to be adopted for 3 months on trial and at the expiration of that period the Medical Officer be requested to report to the Board his opinion upon the changes.

# Irish Immigration

In the early to mid-nineteenth century, Irish immigration to England, Scotland and Wales accelerated enormously and proved a huge problem for the Poor Law Board and Union administration.

There had always been migration from Ireland to the mainland, often of a temporary nature, in the form of seasonal employment, but the worsening conditions of the Irish economy, coupled with the potato famine, proved catastrophic for the poorest of Irish society. Indeed, the potato had for many years been the mainstay of the diet for the most destitute citizens on the island, and, when the late blight pathogen attacked the crops in the harvest years of 1845-9, the Irish poor had to make some very unpalatable decisions:

‘Potatoes dug out, in an apparently sound state, have become a mass of rotteness... and those which remain in the ground are extensively diseased.’

## ***Manchester Guardian, 22nd September 1849***

Starvation and disease were rampant. In the first five months of 1847, therefore, 300,000 destitute men, women and children sailed across the Irish Sea to Liverpool seeking work. Many undertook further journeys in pursuit of employment in the Lancashire cotton mills. Those that remained in Liverpool endured slum lodging houses and cramped cellars already occupied by earlier Irish migrants. There was little or no sanitation – overcrowding, disease, alcoholism and general squalor prevailed. In addition, the influx of new Irish settlers was not welcomed by the authorities and those who sought help from the Poor Law Unions were frequently returned to Ireland under the Poor Law Removal Act.

By the 1860s, with the advent of the cotton famine in the Lancashire mills, many families – including the Irish settlers – began to seriously consider leaving Britain to emigrate to the ‘colonies’ of Australia, New Zealand and the United States. Weekly advertisements in local newspapers testify to this state of affairs.

## ***26th July 1862, Hereford Journal***

Overcrowding Omnibuses.– The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals have given public notice of their intention to prosecute, under the Act of Parliament, all omnibus proprietors who permit the overcrowding of their vehicles, to the injury of their horses, and the danger to the public.

## ***24th April 1847, Manchester Guardian***

The Irish Poor – For several days past, the union workhouse in this town has been literally besieged by half-clad and miserable-looking objects, principally Irish, seeking for something to sustain nature. The sight of the squalid looking children, crying most piteously as they sit on the flags in front of the office, is painful in the extreme; the place is scarcely free of applicants. We are assured that during the last month, no less than 1,800 Irish men, women and children, in addition to the regular poor, have called at the workhouse for relief. On Wednesday, at the Ashton Petty Sessions, several families were brought up by the overseer, Mr Turner, to obtain their removal to Ireland; but in some instances the parties refused to sign their examinations, and no threat of imprisonment, or other punishment, could induce them to do so. On Thursday, several families were taken out of town by the Ashton branch of the Leeds Railway, by the police, who were instructed to convey them to Liverpool, preparatory to their being sent over to Ireland.

## ***16th December 1847***

Owing to the prevailing distress which at present exists, large numbers of paupers have been admitted into the workhouse so as to far exceed the number allowed by the Poor Law Commissioners.... for the welfare of the Officers connected with the establishment and the health and comfort of its inmates directed that no further admissions shall be made until there is a decreased number therein.

During the last fortnight seventy Irish applications for relief have been made and on visiting these cases, they were found in the



most miserable abodes imaginable without bedding, very scanty clothing and scarcely one single comfort that you can name. Very frequently their first application is made on account of sickness – medical assistance has to be provided and necessary relief during the sickness. We could refer you to families who immediately on their arrival into this town from Ireland were taken ill with sickness which was protracted by different members of the family for several months and in one instance seven Medical Officers were given at a cost of £2 9s and relief to the amount of £8...

thereof considered it your duty for the welfare of the officers connected with that establishment and the health and comfort of its inmates directed that no further admissions shall be made until there is a decreased number therein. We take upon ourselves the liberty of addressing you on the subject in respect of the numerous applications from non-Settled Poor\* and in so doing we cannot but express our unfeigned regret that you should have been compelled from a sense of duty to have come to such a decision. The necessity of proper workhouse accommodation cannot be more severely felt than at a time like the present and Poor Rates must be considerably increased for the want of it. Proof of this is clearly shown from the fact that during the last 3 weeks 299 orders for admission into the workhouse were given, but of these only 33 being less than one ninth of the whole came into the workhouse and several of these immediately left it and have not since applied for relief. We would here remark that the whole of these parties belong to other parishes and had not been resident here for the last five years....

It is well known to you all that the non-settled poor of a district like this, where the population has increased so rapidly within the last few years must be very numerous, and we take the liberty to state from our own experience, having been connected with parochial affairs for several years that there is no class of paupers so difficult to deal with as the non-settled poor.

In consequence of the late Removal Order Act, it is now almost universal in all Unions to discontinue relief to non-settled poor and to remove them to their places of settlement, therefore it follows as a matter of course that evidence must be procured to make out the settlement, an Order obtained and their parties conveyed to their own parishes, all of which is attended with a considerable expense....

Had the before mentioned 299 cases not been so tested but had obtained outdoor relief, we should have been obliged either to have given it at the expense of this parish or have taken out orders of Removal, and 120 out of the above number being English cases. Orders for their removal would have taxed the Rate payers to the amount of £900....



Engraving depicting the figure of 'the Irish street-seller,' taken from *The London Labour and the London Poor*, a work authored by Victorian journalist Henry Mayhew (1851). Credit: Google Books

### 16th December 1847

*Letter from Enoch Taverner, Assistant Overseer*  
 .... Owing to the prevailing distress which at present exists large numbers of paupers have been admitted into the workhouse so as to far exceed the number allowed by the Poor Law Committee and you having in consequence

But the effects on the Irish greatly exceed that of the English for so soon as ever you relieve an Irish family in any district the fact becomes notorious. Numerous applications are immediately made by their neighbours and there is no possibility of checking it without offering them the workhouse and promptly removing them in the event of their accepting it. To administer outdoor relief to the Irish except in very extreme cases is almost sure to result in gross imposition. During the last fortnight seventy Irish applications for relief have been made and on visiting these cases they were found living in the most miserable abodes imaginable, in a very many instances without bedding, very scanty clothing and scarcely one single comfort that you can name very frequently their first application is made on account of sickness....

**9th December 1843,  
Illustrated London News**

The School of Design at Somerset House has established a class in the instruction of females in wood engraving. It is already well attended, and has added another to the very limited opportunities for the occupation of female talent which exist in this country.

**2nd March 1848**

I am directed by the Poor Law Board to acknowledge receipt of your letter requesting the advice of the Board in the case of an Irishman taken before the Magistrates for the purpose of obtaining the necessary order for the removal to Ireland, but who obstinately refused to be sworn and was therefore ordered into custody; the Magistrates at the same time doubling their power to commit him for such refusal.

**24th June 1852**

.... a copy of a deposition made by Theresa McLoughlin who was lately removed with her three children from the workhouse of the above union to Ireland and is now an inmate of the North Dublin Union Workhouse. The Board have received this deposition from the Commissioners for administering the Law for the relief of the poor in Ireland, now state that it appears to them

from her deposition that Theresa McLoughlin had acquired a residence of sufficient duration in Dukinfield to render her irremovable\* to Ireland.

*Theresa McLoughlin is listed on the 1851 census as a resident of Dukinfield living with her husband James (employed as a grinder in a cotton mill) and four small children under the age of seven. They shared the property with another family of three, also from Ireland.*

**4th May 1857**

A circular letter was received from the Clerk to the Select Vestry, Liverpool upon the subject of the Irish Poor Removal Bill at present before Parliament pointing out its objectionable provisions and expressing a hope that the Bill will receive the most determined opposition from all the Poor Law Authorities in England or Scotland. It was Resolved that the clerk be instructed to request the Right Hon. Milner Gibson M.P. to forward the Guardians a copy of the Bill and as they are most strongly opposed to its becoming law, they trust that he will use his influence to secure its postponement for a short period until the Board of Guardians throughout the County have had time to express an opinion upon the provisions.

**11th June 1864, Ashton Reporter**

The Irish Removal Cases – Mr. Garside moved that the clerk furnish to the next meeting an account of all the Irish families that are removable, and also an account of what steps the removal officer is taking to effect that removal.

Mr. Cartwright seconded the motion, which after some little discussion, was carried.

**20th March 1858, Bury Times**

A BUST OF THE PRINCE CONSORT FOR MANCHESTER. His Royal Highness the Prince Consort honoured Mr Matthew Noble with sitting for a bust, about to be presented by the committee of the Art Treasures Exhibition to the city of Manchester.

# Lancashire Cotton Famine (1861-65)

The Lancashire Cotton Famine, a period of extreme hardship and deprivation brought on by a variety of factors, had a devastating effect on employment, hugely increasing demand for Poor Law Union assistance. The industry had always experienced recurring episodes of decline, but none so protracted as this difficult spell.

Most Lancashire cotton originated from the southern states of America. In the years 1859-60, many plantations in this area over-produced and, as a result, the market was flooded with a world surplus of cotton. A considerable number of the larger Lancashire cotton manufacturers took advantage of this increased supply, buying the surplus cheaply and stockpiling the product in order to sell this reserve to India and the Far East, where there remained a huge demand for cotton goods. These years were therefore extremely successful for the manufacturer.

The outbreak of the American Civil War (1861-65) between the Northern states and the slave-owning South, however, brought this period of prosperity to an abrupt end. This conflict was to have destructive implications for the export of cotton to Britain. The Union blockade levelled against the Confederate south brought imports to Liverpool to a virtual standstill. At the same time, the Lancashire cotton workers, at great personal cost to themselves, banded together and pledged not to work with cotton picked by slaves. Prior to this, three quarters of the crop grown in the southern states had been exported to Britain.

'... and that the erasure of that foul blot on civilisation and Christianity – chattel slavery – during your presidency, will cause the name of Abraham Lincoln to be honoured and revered by posterity.'

*Letter to President Abraham Lincoln from the 'Working People of Manchester,' a document arising from a Public Meeting held in the Manchester Free Trade Hall (31st December 1862).*

Some of the larger manufacturers initially profited from the cessation of shipping, selling their stockpiled cotton for an increased price.

Attempts were made to replace American cotton by importing product from eastern India. Unfortunately, there were a number of problems with this approach, such as inadequate infrastructure for transportation, poor soil and old-fashioned methods of agriculture. Quality became an increasingly pressing issue.

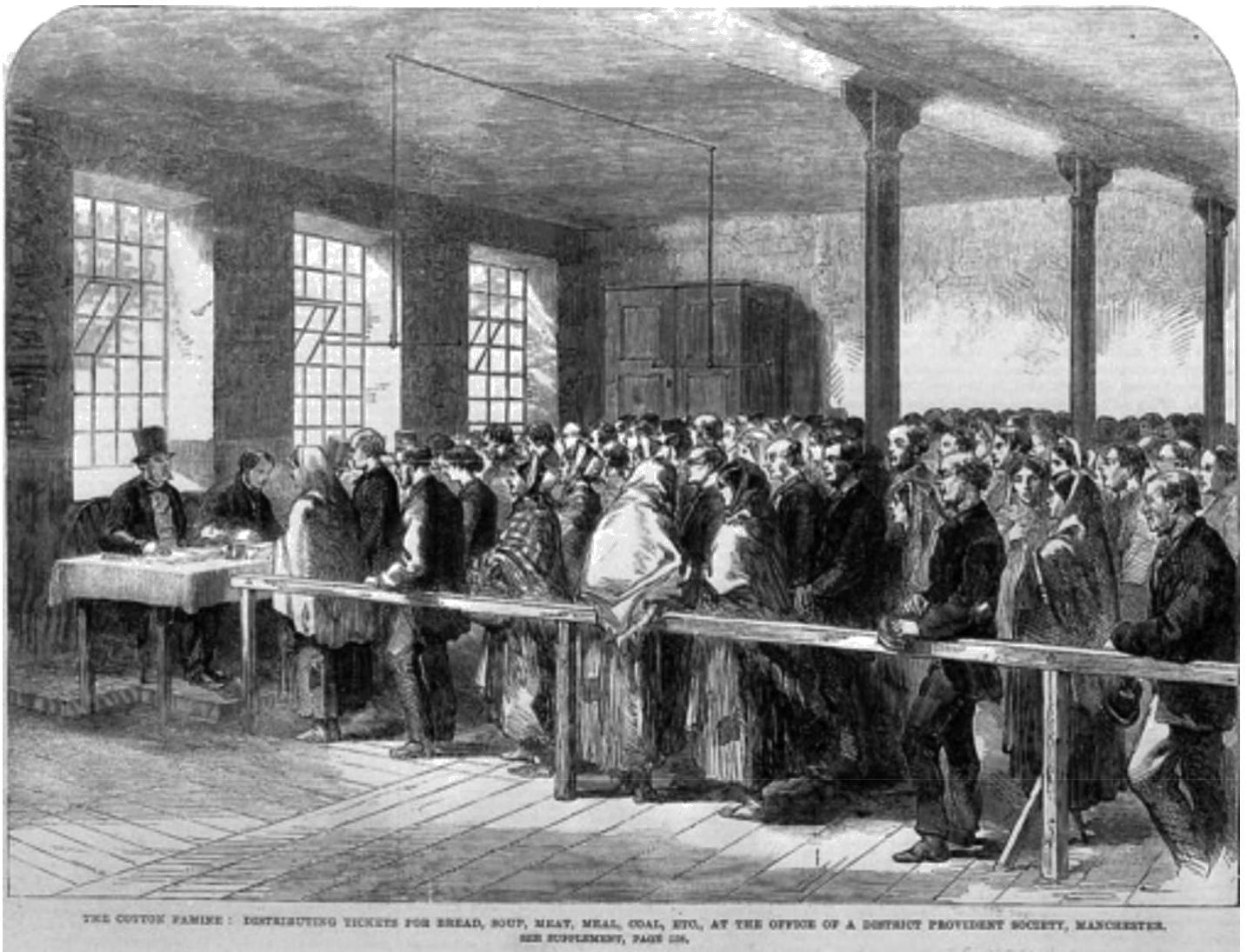
Employers used their initiative to keep as many factories open as possible, but workers suffered both wage cuts and shorter hours. Some sympathetic manufacturers such as Hugh Mason, a producer of cotton at Ashton's Oxford Mills, managed to maintain operation of their premises during the crisis, making use of the inferior raw cotton gathered from India. Although the conditions were difficult for these workers, the situation was far worse for those who now found themselves unemployed. As well as the closure of the mills, increased mechanisation had also contributed to reduced numbers of jobs in the industry.

At first, those without permanent positions could only turn to the Poor Law Unions. In Ashton, 42% of the population were on relief at this time. Those in receipt of the latter had to supply in turn labour such as digging in the fields, oakum picking and road building. Women were compelled to attend sewing classes. This number notwithstanding, many preferred to suffer rather than apply for assistance.

As Poor Law Relief depended on the levy from the poor rate, the general downturn in the economy amidst a contracting world market affected householders and businesses to the extent that the contribution from ratepayers could not be increased. In February 1862, therefore, relief committees were set up in the worst hit areas such as Ashton and Stockport.

In 1863 the Public Works Act was passed enabling local authorities to obtain a loan to pay unemployed workers on various public projects. During this period the workers carried out a number of protests in Ashton, Stalybridge and Dukinfield, but were hampered by the fact that they were in receipt of relief.





The Cotton Famine: distributing tickets for bread, soup, meat, coal etc., at the office of a district provident society, Manchester.  
Credit: Wellcome Collection

By 1864 many workers had left the area, some travelling to Yorkshire to work in the woollen mills there, whilst others emigrated to the 'colonies' to begin a new life.

The American Civil War concluded in 1865 with the official abolition of slavery and gradually cotton began to be imported again – the worst of the crisis was over. Those who had suffered through this period of adversity, however, were not quick to forget such destitution and impoverishment.

### **28th September 1862, Manchester Guardian**

As the distress increases – which it does most rapidly week by week – the poor operatives grow increasingly more and more downcast. All hope seems to have left them that they will be relieved by a God-send of cotton... how bravely, how nobly they look steadily in the face of misery – the sad calamity which has overtaken them. I learn that in Ashton-under-Lyne the increase in numbers on the relief books is absolutely alarming; and the chairman of

the Board of Guardians, at their weekly meeting, held on Thursday, stated that in no part of this distressed district is the weekly increase of pauperism greater than it is in Ashton...

As in nearly every other distressed town a sewing class has been established in Ashton and is doing good service. About 120 girls' names are upon its books, and amongst this number are numerous, skilful and elaborate workers, who seem to take especial delight in vying with each other in steadily pursuing their work, and fully earning the small pittance which is weekly awarded to them for their dextrous labour.

### **21st March 1863, Manchester Courier**

#### **Riot at Stalybridge**

The military called out – Yesterday (Friday), a riot broke out at Stalybridge, when the relief stores were forcibly entered, and a vast amount of property was destroyed. It appears that there had been a three-fold complaint by the persons attending the schools against the relief



committee. The first is the stoppage of 4d per week from the weekly payment of the scholars; the second, the proposition to retain a day's wage in hand from one week to another; and third is paying them by ticket instead of money as heretofore. Two of these new regulations coming into force yesterday, some of the schools turned out, formed a procession, and fetched out the rest. They then perambulated the streets, shouting and hooting. They then visited the different relief stores which they ransacked, throwing the clothing etc. through the windows, while others stole the articles and ran away with them. They afterwards commenced to smash the windows, and at the stores in Caroline Street the things were set on fire, but were speedily extinguished by the police. By this time a troop of the 14th Hussars stationed at the Ashton Barracks, and headed by the Mayor, Mr. Hopwood, and Mr. David Harrison; the latter read out the Riot Act, and the military then dispersed the mob by means of riding amongst them, and threatening to strike them with the backs of their swords.... Upwards of sixty people have been taken into custody. The magistrates are swearing in special constables and Mr. Little, Deputy Chief Constable of the Cheshire Constabulary, has arrived with fifty of his men in the town. The streets are crowded, but all is quiet at present.

### **28th March 1863, Manchester Courier**

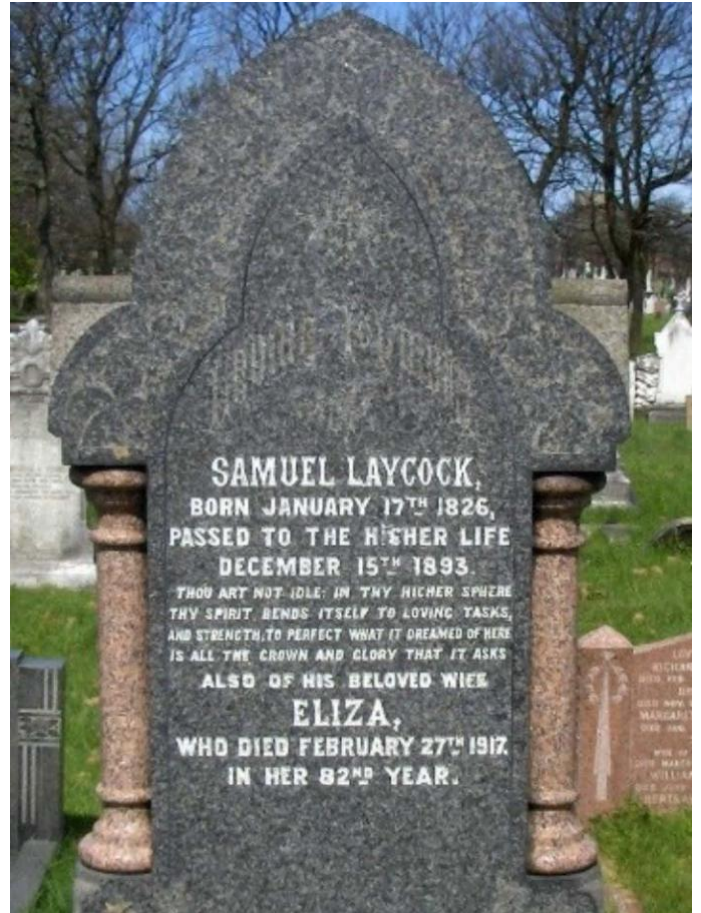
Ashton Board of Guardians – The Chairman announced that the Stalybridge Relief Committee intended to offer the adult scholars tickets for relief that morning, and if the scholars refused to receive them, they would be referred to the guardians.... It would be the duty of the guardians to take notice of these applications in the usual way, and it simply remained with the guardians in what way they would treat the applicants. It was Agreed that the guardians would treat the applicants without reference to their non-acceptance of tickets.

### **28th October 1863, Manchester Guardian**

Letter – Pauperism in Ashton – to the editor of the Manchester Guardian

Sir.... he will at once see that 15,207 is the number of paupers in the union of Ashton for last week, which union comprises the whole of the borough of Ashton, the whole of the borough of Stalybridge, and the following townships or hamlets, viz., Dukinfield, Stayley, Newton, Broadbottom, Mottram, Tintwistle, Lees,

Droylsden, Denton, Houghton, and Audenshaw, and nearly the whole of Mossley, a district almost wholly dependent on the cotton trade, and with concerns of very large magnitude in Stalybridge, Dukinfield and Broadbottom that have been closed for nearly two years; that is, I think a very good reason for the number of paupers in that large and populous union.



The grave of poet Samuel Laycock at Layton Cemetery, Blackpool. Credit: Wikipedia.

### **“Cheer Up A Bit Longer.” By Samuel Laycock**

*CHEER up a bit longer, mi brothers i' want,  
There's breeter days for us i' store;  
There'll be plenty o' tommy an' wark for us o,  
When this 'Merica bother gets o'er.  
Yo'n struggled reet nobly, an' battled reet  
hard, While things han bin lookin' so feaw;  
Yo'n borne wi' yor troubles an' trials so  
long, It's no use o' givin' up neaw....  
It's hard to keep clemmin' an' starvin', it's true;  
An' it's hard to see th' little things fret  
Becose there's no buttercakes for 'em to eat;  
But we'n allus kept pooin' through yet.  
As bad as toimes are, an' as feaw as things  
look, One's certain they met ha' bin worse;  
For we'n gotten a trifle o' summat, so fur,  
- It's only bin roughish, of course....*

1864 Broad Carr Road

June 7<sup>th</sup> 2 Ashler Barrows & Walling Hammer

July 11 3 Hollow Tools

" 15 2 Yards of Block Rope

" 15 2 Hand Carts hired from William Katherine Street at 6 per day and to be returned in good repair

July 16 6 lbs of Blotting powder

" 21 3 picks

August 3 1 Mallet & Chisels as sin

2 15+15<sup>th</sup> Chisels grills

Sept 8 4 Spades and 2 picks

2 lb of grease for use of Carts

Sept 15 12 yards of rope

16 3 chisels sledge hammer and stone pick

19 6 Barrows 6 walling hammers 1 paving Hammer Middle

Oct 7 1 hand cart from J. Lawson

10 New hand Cart and Rope

18 6 Barrows sent to Lee Road from Hardshead

now 3 one pint of cart oil &

Lee's Road

1864

Jan<sup>th</sup> 4 10 Barrows & picks & Spades

— 24 planks

— 6 1 pick

— 11 2 picks 2 Crow bars

— 18 2 Barrows

— 23 2 Hollow Tools

— 25 10 planks

Feb<sup>th</sup> 7 6 planks

" 4 6 Barrows

" 19 2 Barrows

" 24 1 Barrow

" 27 2 Barrows

March<sup>th</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> 4 Barrows

" 3 12 planks spike hammers & walling hammer

June 13 2 spades

5 Barrows from Jauntton

July 19 2 Hollow Tools

List of tools given out from Ashton Old Hall for the repair of roads by men on relief work during the cotton famine.  
Credit: Tameside Local Studies & Archives

**30th July 1853,**

**Salisbury and Winchester Journal**

AN ANTI-WEATHER COMPANY has just started for bringing out umbrellas and parasols in wet and sultry weather. The borrower to lodge a shilling for the safe return of the article, and pay a penny an hour for loan. The company has laid in a stock of 25,000 umbrellas and parasols.

**Emigration**

**21st December 1861, Ashton Reporter**

Queensland – Emigration and the cotton supply  
On Thursday evening for upwards of two hours, we listened with much pleasure to the first of two empire lectures by Henry Jordan Esq., the

Government Emigration Commissioner from the new Australian colony of Queensland, delivered in the Ashton Town Hall. There were between 1300 and 1400 persons present. Mr. Jordan's lectures, the same as they had been elsewhere, have been a complete success in Ashton. The matter of his discourses – and we only regret that we have not more space to devote to them – was most admirable, and the manner of the lecture both attractive and fascinating. Mr. Jordan proves that to Queensland we may confidently look for large supplies of capital cotton, if we are in the meantime true to ourselves in sending out capital and workmen to till the fields ready to yield a grateful return. But of all, the climate is such that white men can do all the outdoor work, and the land is such as to secure a full reward for their labour. The Europeans can cultivate cotton for Europe, and allow our cousins across the Atlantic, time to settle their quarrels...



# HYDE RELIEF BOARD.

*Report for the Week Ending January 17 1863.*

Population in District for which Committee acts		17192	
Number of Mills		21	
Number of Operatives		8913	
Do.	working full time	1143	
Do.	do. 4 or 5 days per week	2388	
Do.	do. 3 days per week	570	
Do.	do. 2 days and under	1052	
Do.	out of work	3790	
Estimated loss of wages		✓	
<i>week Ending Jan: 14</i>	BOARD OF GUARDIANS	Average number of persons relieved in corresponding weeks of <sup>1860</sup> <del>1858</del> to 1861	279
		Number of persons relieved this week	2325
		Amount expended by Guardians this week	163.8.10
Number of Applications		1609	
Do.	Cases relieved	1562	
Do.	Persons relieved, also aided by Guardians	2283	
Do.	do. do., not Do.	3041	
Total number of persons relieved		5324	
Amount granted to persons aided by Guardians		127.12.6	
Do.	do. not Do.	226.14.4	
Total Amount granted for Provisions and Cash		354.6.6	
Amount paid for Clothing		51.18.3	
Do.	Education	16.10.11	
Do.	Sewing Class	122.6.6	
Do.	Recreation	1.10.0	
Do.	Cooking Depot	7.14.7	
Total expenditure of the week		594.17.9	
Tons of Coal given			
A	Amount received from Local sources	392.7.2	
	Do. Mansion House Committee	✓	
	Do. Central Committee	✓	
	Do. other sources	18.9.0	
Balance in Treasurer's hands		108.5.2	
Amount given by Millowners to their own work-people			

Stockport  
Lancs  
A.C.

A Including 10.14.8 for Cooking Depot.

## CLOTHING.

	Flannel Vests.	Drawers.	Chemises.	Petticoats.	Night Dresses.	Dresses and Frocks.	Shawls.	Stockings.	Clogs.	Monthly Loans.	Pinnafore.	Jackets.	Coats.	Vests.	Trousers.	Shirts.
WOMEN....	286	51	403	323	24	226	56	367		2						
GIRLS....			119	148	5	115		125			37	5				
MEN.....	248	6						235					39	43	63	257
BOYS.....								78				48		42	57	85

BEDDING.— 33 Mattresses; 244 Blankets; 185 Sheets; 88 Bed Covers.

**31st January 1863, Ashton Reporter**

The influx of emigrants

A sudden influx of nearly 2000 persons in a small town like Brisbane causes many of these persons to have to undergo considerable inconvenience for a short time in the manner of accommodation; and too often, writing to their friends at home under the influence of their first impressions, they are apt to give the colony a bad name. It is noticeable however, to any resident in Brisbane, that bodies of immigrants thus arriving are absorbed in a marvellous manner. For two or three days after the arrival of a batch of ships, crowds of newcomers are seen in the streets. A fortnight afterwards they are nearly all gone...

**25th April 1863, Manchester Courier**

Distress and Emigration – Mr. Vernon, Emigration Agent, states that about 1000 persons have left Stalybridge and the neighbourhood for other countries since the distress commenced.

**8th March 1864, Manchester Courier**

Emigration from Ashton and the district – A considerable number of emigrants to New York, said to have been engaged as weavers, left the Charlestown station, Ashton, yesterday morning. The departure was witnessed by thousands of persons, every available place near the station being crowded. The disposition among the working class present seemed to be strongly in favour of emigration. We understand that there will be another batch of emigrants despatched from Stalybridge and the district on Wednesday. Altogether hundreds upon hundreds of the best cotton operatives are leaving this once flourishing district, and the question is one of serious importance as to where the skilled workmen and women are to come from when trade revives.

**3rd January 1865, Manchester Courier**

The emigration from Liverpool during the past year shows a falling off as compared with 1863, of 12,537 passengers. The total number shipped during the twelve months was rather over 194,000. More than 60,000 Irish emigrants sailed from Liverpool for the United States.

**28th January 1860,  
The Staffordshire Sentinel**

At Portsmouth, last week, many of the fishing boats arrived so deeply laden with mackerel as to be obliged to let go their nets to save the vessels from swamping. Some had 40,000 fish on board. Upwards of a million and a half of mackerel were netted within a few miles of the back of the Isle of Wight.



*Comic Song*  
*Comic Song*  
H. 1260  
1-35

JUST-STARVE-US.  
WORKHOUSE



Tell Ah! Tell us, can aught be worse?  
Than hungry Maw & empty Purse!!  
MERCY SHOW & PITY US,  
GREAT OVERSEER.

Comic Song  
*Sung with unbounded applause by*  
MR GRAHAM,  
*at the* Royal Pavillion.  
WORDS BY  
W. H. FREEMAN,  
MUSIC BY  
*Auber.*

Ent. Sta. Hall.

Price 7/-

LONDON.  
Published by TREGEAR & LEWIS,  
96, CHEAPSIDE.  
*where may be had the following Popular Songs.*

REST THOU GENTLE SEA.  
THE MISS-LED-GENTLEMAN. *Comic.*  
GOING OUT FISHING. *Comic.*

# Glossary

**Agapemone** – A Greek term meaning ‘abode of love,’ Agapemone signified the religious cult established by controversial Reverend Henry James Prince in 1846. This Adventist group was heavily populated by unmarried, wealthy women with its leader subject to accusations of sexual abuse and brainwashing.

**Act of Settlement** – This 1662 Act mandated the determination of each pauper’s place of legal settlement, resulting in the development of Settlement Examinations and Settlement Certificates.

**Certificates of Chargeability** – These bills were sent out to other parishes for the repayment of costs following the provision of financial assistance to poor and vagrant persons in a parish other than that to which they belonged, in accordance with the principle of settlement. See **Non-Settled Poor**.

**Charter Incorporation** – Under the Municipal Corporations Act 1835, resident householders of a town were permitted to request a charter of incorporation, forming a borough with significant local powers. These municipal corporations were manned by elected trustees.

**Child ‘Dropping’** – This was the practice of abandoning babies and children which became something of a national phenomenon in the 1850s. There are many references to the practice in local newspapers.

**Dietary** – This schematic specified sets of meals within the workhouse, commonly modified to produce different variants so as to suit the wide range of those claiming relief.

**Gilbert’s Act (Relief of the Poor Act 1782)**

– This piece of legislation, informally named after its sponsor Thomas Gilbert MP, permitted the establishment of a workhouse for all paupers and instituted significant changes in the management of the institution, such as the implementation of the Board of Guardians.

**Guarantee Association** – The Guarantee Society was founded in London in 1840 by Henry Rodgers, a Bank of England official. This company offered fidelity insurance on behalf of employers to protect against embezzlement and fraud. Other such entities followed suit. Masters and matrons were required to provide surety to the Board of Guardians either through these groups or via a bond prior to taking up an offer of employment.

**Inspector of Nuisances** – This official was statutorily employed by local authorities under the 1848 Public Health Act with overall responsibility for sanitation and public health.

**Instant (Inst.)** – This month (taken from the Latin *instante mense* – in the present month).

**Irremovability** – From 1846 the Poor Law Removal Act stated that an individual resident in a single parish for more than five years received ‘irremovable’ status under the laws of settlement. This period was reduced to one year by 1865.

**Lessee** – Tenant

**Non-Settled Poor** – This term comprised those not eligible for a settlement certificate under the poor relief system in the area where they resided. The bills for these individuals were returned to their own parish for payment. See also **Certificates of Chargeability**.

**Oakum Picking** – This was a common task given to inmates of the workhouse. The practice involved unwinding quantities of rope in order to produce fibres known as oakum. This material was then mixed with tar or grease and used to caulk ships, rendering them watertight.

**Order of Maintenance** – This legal process, introduced under the Bastardy Act in 1845, permitted an application to be made by the mothers of illegitimate children to the Justices of the Peace in the event that the father neglected to pay maintenance. The scope of

such orders was further extended under the administration of the Poor Law to include other potentially dependent relationships such as elderly parents and children.

**Order of Removal** – This official documentation mandating the transfer of an individual or family to their parish of settlement was completed by the Board of Guardians. See also **Removal**.

**Out-Relief** – Out relief or outdoor relief was given to those seeking assistance who lived outside the workhouse. This took the form of money, clothes and food.

**Pauper** – This term designated an unemployed individual experiencing hardship in receipt of relief under the provisions of the Poor Law Board.

**Pauperism** – This term encompasses those individuals suffering from poverty and in receipt of relief as administered under the Poor Law system.

**Poor Rates** – This local tax whereby the value of a property was officially assessed and the resident charged a rate according to its worth was introduced in 1572. The money was used to assist the relief of the poor.

**Pots of Porter** – Porter is a type of dark beer traditionally consumed by the street and river porters from whom it received its name.

**Removal** – This was the process by which a person was returned to their parish of settlement. See also **Order of Removal**.

**Settlement Certificate** – This document was received by those who had undergone a successful settlement examination by a magistrate to determine their current chargeability. To be eligible one had to meet certain criteria such as employment or residency. See also **Settlement Examinations**.

**Settlement Examinations** – These legally binding examinations endeavoured to determine an individual's or family's place of settlement. This would generally denote place of birth. Such inspections were often precursors to removal. See also **Settlement Certificate**.

**Test Order** – The 1842 Outdoor Labour Test Order extended the use of outdoor relief to the able-bodied poor. This was in contravention of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act which sought to abolish outdoor relief in favour of support within the workhouse itself only.

**Ultimo (ult.)** – Last month (taken from the Latin ultimo mense – in the last month).

# Bibliography

Tameside Local Studies & Archives Research Materials:

Minute Books of the Ashton Poor Law Guardians (1837-1869)  
Ashton Union Workhouse Constitution  
Ashton Reporter Archives

**No admission or discharge registers associated with the workhouse have survived, nor are there any extant directories of births, baptisms or deaths.**

**The following books provided useful background information on the institution of the workhouse:**

Englander, David. *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in 19th Century Britain, 1834-1914*. London & New York: 2013.

Family History Society of Cheshire. *Ashton-under-Lyne Poorhouse and Union Workhouse Census Returns, 1841-1901*. 2002.

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Higginbotham, Peter. *A Grim Almanac of the Workhouse*. Stroud: The History Press, 2013.

Higginbotham, Peter. *The Workhouse Encyclopedia*. Stroud: The History Press, 2012.

Higginbotham, Peter. *The Workhouse Cookbook*. Stroud: The History Press, 2008.

Higgs, Michelle. *Life in the Victorian and Edwardian Workhouse*. Stroud: The History Press, 2009.

The following digital resources proved vital tools in the production of this book:

*Ancestry*  
*Archives+ (Manchester Newspapers Online)*  
*The British Library*  
*The British Newspaper Archive*  
*Digital Salford*  
*Findmypast*  
*Graces Guide*  
*National Archives*  
*Wellcome Collection*





**ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE UNION. — CHILD FOUND.**

**F**OUND, on Friday, the 29th ult., near to Guide Bridge, Ashton-under-Lyne, A BOY about 4 or 5 years of age, who says his name is Kenworthy. He had on an old black cotton frock, an old calico shirt, and an old black cloth cap, and was without shoes and stockings.

Whoever has lost the above child, may have him restored by applying at the Union Workhouse, Chamber Hills, Ashton-under-Lyne.

**JOSH. HIGGINBOTTOM, Clerk.**

Delamere-street, 4th September, 1856.