

‘EXCELLENT ORDER THROUGHOUT’: DERBY WORKHOUSE, 1834–1844

By JEAN LINDSAY

In 1834 the Poor Law Report showed that half the total pauper population of England and Wales was the non-able bodied poor. Many were given relief in their own homes but some were maintained in workhouses or almshouses. Many parishes maintained a general mixed workhouse in which the able-bodied poor, the aged and impotent persons and the sick poor lived. The administration was sometimes corrupt and often inefficient. Accounts were rarely kept and although the magistrates appointed the overseer, they played little part in the control of the paupers. The Poor Laws were administered by 15,000 parishes and were still essentially those of Elizabeth's statute of 1601. The aim was not clearly defined, and succeeding generations fluctuated between making conditions of relief so harsh as to be a deterrent and attempting to achieve rehabilitation. The Speenhamland system, which became popular during the Napoleonic Wars, made up labourers' wages to subsistence level according to a sliding-scale which varied with the applicant's wage, the size of his family and the price of bread. By 1834 the allowance-system had come in for much criticism and was blamed not only for the rapidly increasing poor rate—£7,000,000 in 1832 as against £1,500,000 in 1775—but also for the increase in population.

Edwin Chadwick was one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the New Poor Law, which was introduced in 1834 by the Poor Law Amendment Act. It aimed at efficiency, order and uniformity. Outdoor relief for the able-bodied was to be abolished. Relief was to be obtained only in efficiently-run workhouses where conditions were to be so severe as to act as a deterrent. Workhouses for individual parishes were to be abolished in favour of a well-run workhouse for a union of parishes. Chadwick's theory was that the industrious, respectable poor need never fear the workhouse, as it was intended to deter and punish only those who did not adhere to the virtuous life.¹ In the light, however, of the poverty and unemployment of the 1830s and 1840s, the new workhouses or 'Bastilles' seemed frighteningly cruel. Many people preferred near-starvation and their shadow haunted many respectable working-class families until the Welfare State abolished the workhouse in favour of national insurance and social security.

Michael Rose and other historians have shown that the recommendation not to give relief and allowances to the able-bodied outside the workhouse was never fully put into practice and that in many of the New Poor Law Unions of the northern manufacturing districts, the 'workhouse test' was never applied. Michael Rose argues that much of the misery of the New Poor Law came from the failure to eradicate the inadequate dole and relief in kind of the Old Poor Law system.² Some workhouses, however, like the one at Andover in 1845, gained notoriety from their cruelty and reinforced the *Oliver Twist* image. The New Poor Law operated more successfully in Derby, and examination of the records of the Derby Union for the first ten years of its existence,³ provides evidence of the difficulties encountered, and sometimes overcome, in controlling the poor and in establishing a 'well-regulated' workhouse.⁴ In Derby, the workhouse test was generally adhered to, as work was fairly readily available in the town, although the framework knitters were recognised as a special class. The virtual absence of the allowance system in Derby in the years 1834 to 1844, seem to have resulted in better conditions for the able-bodied poor, provided they could accept workhouse discipline.

The Derby workhouse served the area of the borough which included five ancient parishes, St. Alkmund, St. Peter, St. Werburgh, All Saints, and St. Michael. The Laws of Settlement were still in operation whereby every parish was obliged only to relieve its own poor, and newcomers who became chargeable could be returned to their own

parish. This tended to make for immobility of labour and caused much hardship. The Derby records reveal instances of dying people who became the subject of correspondence about whether their relief would be paid by their native parish or they themselves put under 'suspended orders' for removal. On 16 May 1838 the clerk to the Derby Union wrote to the relieving officer in Uttoxeter about Elizabeth Slater whose parents belonged to Doveridge but who had never gained any settlement in her own right. She was dangerously ill and had been given outdoor relief consisting of 4lb bread, 1oz tea and ½lb sugar, and was expected to go into the Derbyshire Infirmary. If she did not obtain the required 'recommendation' she would need to be taken into the workhouse. The question at issue was whether Uttoxeter would support her in Derby. A similar case occurred on 5 September 1838 when a request for relief in Derby was made by Derby Union on behalf of the dying Stephen Sounds of Cheadle. The 'suspended orders' had to be served personally on Cheadle at their expense. In the case of Sounds the relief would be short-term, but Cheadle would have to bear the expense of 'coffin and fees in case of death'.

The distances travelled by the poor despite the Laws of Settlement, were indicated by a list, dated 19 March 1840, of Unions which had sent money to Derby Union for the support of their paupers. The places were: Mansfield, Salford, Warrington, Cheadle, Coventry, Shardlow; and those for 21 March 1840 were given as: Loughborough, Bromsgrove, Wednesbury, Amersham, Barrow-upon-Soar and St. George's Parish, Hanover Square. This indicated a fairly large area of migration. Many of the paupers had come in search of work, and this was one of the problems the Derby Union faced. The clerk reported to Edwin Chadwick on 20 June 1839:

'As there have been many Families migrating to this Town from the Agricultural districts for the purpose of being employed and as some of the Guardians are Manufacturers and the Town at large are interested in keeping down Expenses they wish to understand through the Commissioners whether this mode of spending the public money unsuccessfully is to be resorted to by parties who ought to have been interested in keeping their paupers in employ, and whether when a Family is migrated in the way these have been (John Morrell's Family, Deddington), would it not be better for the Unions from whence they are migrated to forward a Communication to the Union into which they are sent stating such to be the case, and requesting that in case of sickness that Board would attend to them as to their own poor which would be repaid, this we should have great pleasure in doing or using all means possible to carry out the intention of the Legislature.'

Most of the individual parish workhouses were sold when the new Union workhouse was established. In 1837 St. Alkmund and St. Werburgh were put up for sale, and by 1839 the new workhouse had been completed at a cost of £8,000, with the parishes contributing a proportion of the expense. The money had been advanced by the Derby and Derbyshire Banking Company, and on 14 November 1839 the amount still outstanding was £5,500. Interest was payable at 4 per cent.

Those who were responsible for the organisation of the workhouse were the governor, the matron, the school-teachers and the chaplain. The governor was appointed by the Board of Guardians and had to be approved by the Poor Law Commissioners. On 5 October 1838 Ratcliffe Gawthorne and Ann his wife were appointed as governor and matron of the 'new workhouse'. Gawthorne made his report of the activities of the institution and some of his comments give valuable insight into the lives of the poorest section of the community. On 4 August 1839 the governor admitted Joseph Newton and John Ride 'from Prison, *very hardened*'. On 15 August he described James Dawson, who had absconded and been brought back to the house as 'in a very filthy state'. He had absconded many times before, always returning 'very full of Cutaneous disease and vermin'. The governor reported that he had put him on 'Punishment Diet' for three days. James Dawson was said to be a 'partial idiot'.

Those who were mentally sick posed serious problems when they were placed in the workhouse. The governor reported on 30 September 1839 that Mary Cockayne was 'dangerously insane', being violent in her attacks on the matron and fellow inmates. In addition, she made use of 'such obscene language that would shock any female.' A similar complaint was made on 4 July 1840 about two insane women, Hannah Garner and Elizabeth Benson, who made a disturbance every night. On 5 February 1842 a plea was made for help with another inmate, William Wall, who needed two people with him to keep him quiet.

The lighter side of the governor's duties was shown by the entry for 27 August 1839:

'Having promised the Children to take them out a Walk, I accordingly took them to Littleover and gave the Boys an opportunity of flying their Kites in a field, and the Girls of amusing themselves about the Field.'

The number of inmates fluctuated from month to month, as there were regular discharges and admittances. Usually there was a record of a death in the house, often of a child, and there was sometimes a notice of an inmate who had absconded. From 1839 to 1842 the total number of inmates fluctuated from 290 to 143. A typical entry was that for 16 January 1841:

'Admitted 4 Men, 6 Women, 2 Boys, 7 Girls, (Samuel Cox Dead). Discharged 6 Men, 3 Women, 3 Boys, 5 Girls (Ann Brentnal Dead). Remaining 216.'

Once admitted, inmates were not allowed to go out of the workhouse except, 'in Cases of urgent necessity.' These 'urgent' cases were recorded and covered a fair range of reasons. A common reason was the need to find work, and on 19 June 1839 the governor wrote:

'Allowed George Bull to go to see after a job of Boating which a man being on Cockpit Hill sent him word about which Message I received.'

The following day John Hodgkinson was allowed out 'to prevent some of his relatives selling the goods of his deceased Brother and consequently deprive his child of the benefit of them, he being its now only protector'. On 10 July the brief entry said, 'William North got work and is gone out'; and on 23 September Edward Clark requested permission to visit his daughter at Barrow for a few days.

On 8 June 1840 Roger Holden was allowed to go to the chaplain, the Rev. John Wakefield, 'who had promised him a Bible if he would call for it.' Holden was said to behave 'very well in the House'. Permission to leave the workhouse was often accompanied by a request for extra help, such as the following plea, made on 10 July 1841, on behalf of Sarah Sherwin and her husband, who had found employment, 'to allow them a little provision, being in a very destitute situation with a large family.'

The conditions inside the workhouse were sometimes far from satisfactory, and the governor often drew the attention of the Board to the difficulties. Water-closets and privies were frequently subjects of complaints. On 24 April 1839 a serious warning was given:

'If something is not done with the Water Closets &c I fear we shall have a Fever in the House as the Summer advances.'

On 23 May 1840 he reported:

'The Water Closets in the probationary are very much out of order somewhere, and the stench is becoming very unpleasant.'

On 26 September 1840 the governor suggested that as the boys broke so many chamber pots, it would be 'better and an economy' if a bucket was allowed in each room.

The lack of proper facilities for laying out the dead was reported on 8 May 1839:

'Would call the serious attention of the Board on the want of a proper ventilated place to lay out the *Dead*. Hitherto we have occupied first one and then another Refractory Ward for that purpose, but for want of proper Ventilation have found them very obnoxious on account of the putrid effluvia being so confined, especially from two Bodies ... I was very ill most of this day on consequence of going in with the Men who took the Measure for the Coffins. And I do recommend also that something should be allowed to the persons who wash the Dead and put them in their Coffins to prevent their being taken ill while performing that office, as I am always obliged to take some stimulant at my own expense or I should certainly not be able to attend during such painful seasons.'

The governor went on to recommend 'the old clothes store' as a suitable place, as it was well-ventilated and near the front gate, and there were seldom any old clothes of the inmates worth storing.

The workhouse diet was not a frequent topic of discussion in the early years, but on 18 November 1839 the governor complained bitterly about the state of the bread:

'I have been under the necessity of sending back the Bread 3 or 4 times in consequence of its being sour, and also from the complaints of the Inmates, and I must have Bread to go on with, and if not provided with good Bread, where am I to get it from?'

Charles Dickens' novel *Oliver Twist* was intended to direct attention to the inhumane treatment workhouse inmates could receive. The novel was serialised in 1837–8 and might have inspired the scene which the governor described on 3 January 1840:

'This day Several of the Men rose up from Table at Dinner time to request me to give them some more Stew, as they said the quantity allowed was not sufficient to work upon. One of them stated that when the last Visitors was there *one of them said* that the quantity allowed at the Thursdays dinner was not sufficient. I told them that they had received their Allowance according to the Diet Table and that I would give them no more, and insisted upon them resuming their seats.'

From 5 July 1839 the older paupers were allowed a change of diet from 'Tea and Butter' to 'Milk porridge'. Occasionally, as on 11 January 1840, parcels containing food were sent in to the house. That for Mary Hogg contained 'a piece of new Flannel a Handkerchief a Basin with dripping, some Tea, Sugar & Tobacco and 6d. in Money.' On 28 June 1839 it was resolved that half a dozen bottles of port wine should be ordered for the sick at 3s. per bottle. Twelve gallons of ale were ordered for the governor and matron, and 7lb of bacon were to be purchased for the sick. On 6 August 1839 a resolution stated that 'aged Women above 65 and Men above 70 should be entitled to receive Tea etc if they should desire it.' Gruel was not mentioned.

'Punishment diet' was frequently referred to, and on 6 October 1840 it was resolved 'That the Governor have discretionary power of withholding Food from persons refusing or neglecting to do a proper quantity of work and report such Cases to the Board.' On 4 June 1839 it was stated that paupers who misbehaved could be sent to a 'Room ... set apart for refractory persons.' Sometimes, as in the case of 9 year-old Timothy Wheldon, all attempts at discipline failed; the governor reported his behaviour on 25 May 1839:

'Would call the attention of the Board to Timothy Wheldon a Boy of 9 years old who has run away 15 times, various means have been resorted to, viz. Corporal punishment, confinement and taken before the Chief Magistrate but all seems in vain for he is gone once more and the Mayor said the next time he was brought *he* would punish him which I would certainly recommend to the Board to have him taken before the Mayor and let *him* deal with him.'

As on 1 June Timothy was reported to have run away twice 'since last week', it seems as if he was truly incorrigible, and on 18 November he was sent to the House of Correction for 14 days' hard labour.

Insubordination was frequently encountered by the governor. On 26 September 1839 he reported:

'Discovered that John Clues went out of the House without leave on the first Sunday of this Month, and on asking him who gave him leave he replied no one, and that he would not be kept in like a prisoner, adding that if he could not get leave he would go out without leave. His manner was very pert, I have placed him on punishment diet until the Board Day.'

On the following day Clues refused to go to the 'Pumping', claiming that he 'could scarcely stand, in consequence of having low diet', but on 1 October Clues was reported to have behaved 'very orderly while on punishment diet.' Hard labour was a punishment given by the magistrates to those referred to them by the governor. On 1 February 1840 two men, George Bull and Robert Walker, were sentenced to hard labour for two months for having got out of the house after 'having been locked up on a Saturday evening.' For lesser crimes, such as being impertinent, a few hours' confinement in the refractory room was ordered. Those who absconded often took clothes with them from the house. On 1 January 1842 Samuel Haynes gave notice to leave the house 'and immediately absconded taking a Pair of trowsers and stockings belonging the house.'

On 18 February 1840 it was resolved that the able-bodied men should be divided by the governor and the medical officer into those 'fully able and the other not so able', and that the able-bodied men were to break $3\frac{1}{4}$ of a yard of stone a week, and 'the other to have it sledged and break 1 yard per Week.' On 6 September 1842 it was resolved that in accordance with the act 5 & 6 Vict c 57, every able-bodied man admitted to the part of the workhouse called the Vagrant Office should be required to break $\frac{3}{4}$ of a yard of boulders within four hours after breakfast in the morning following his admission and that if he refused the governor should take this person before the magistrates as 'an Idle and disorderly person'. On 3 May 1842 the report of a committee appointed to enquire

into the increase of vagrancy had stated that two-thirds of the adults given relief at the Vagrant Office did not exceed 35 years of age. The numbers were increasing as the following figures show:

April 1839 183

April 1840 244

April 1841 263

April 1842 383

One explanation for the increase was partly the difficulties experienced by the framework knitters faced with the ruthless competition of the factory. On 24 December 1839 the clerk to the Derby Union sent a letter to the clerk to the Union in Loughborough about Samuel Foulds, of that area, who was an unemployed, destitute framework knitter, and his wife and six children. The Foulds had been given 32lb of bread, value 5s., and as there were 'a great number of this description out of employ,' the clerk was seeking a general rule for their relief. Another letter of this kind was that of 30 December 1839 sent to the Chesterfield Union, which stated that a family from Chesterfield had applied for relief 'being out of employ (as all the Framework Knitters in this Town are).' One of the children, a 9 year-old boy, earned 1s. 6d. per week and a 7 year-old girl earned 1s. per week. Otherwise, the family had no means of subsistence. Other framework knitters came from Nottingham, and their treatment as a class who could be given relief, seems to bear out Duncan Bythell's view that the New Poor Law prolonged the agony of those who worked in dying trades.⁵

Some of the children's case histories were harrowing. One story illustrating the lack of care sometimes given to children was that of Thomas Odell. The account of him was given in a letter to the chairman of the Union at Woburn on 16 May 1839:

'Thomas Odell states that he is 13 years of age. Was born of parents belonging to Ridgmont in the Woburn Union. That his Father died some years ago and that he has been an inmate of the Woburn Workhouse about three years where his Mother died of Fever. That about a Month ago he was informed by you as head Guardian (I suppose he means Chairman) of the Woburn Union that he must come to Derby where he would find plenty of Work to go to on his arrival. That he was accordingly sent down by the Fly Waggon, the fare being paid by the Officers, and some Bread, cheese and beer given him for his support on the road, but no money to pay lodgings with. On his arrival at Derby he was set down in the Street, without home, or friend, an Orphan and wanderer indeed, and therefore having no home, the poor Boy sought for the first Barn he came near, to make his home and not finding employment he took himself to begging (I hope not stealing) which occupation he has ever since followed until the present time, but being in fear of the Police he has presented himself at this Office in the most filthy and deplorable State and had received an order into the Workhouse until an answer can be received as to the truth of his statement. I should therefore feel obliged by your causing enquiry to be made into the Case and an answer to be sent as early as possible respecting the Boy.'

Boys and girls in the workhouse were often found work, but in Derby, more care seems to have been taken in this matter than appeared to be so in Thomas Odell's case. The boys were sent out as apprentices, and some efforts were made to ensure that the masters were respectable. The following advertisements was sent out on 25 February 1840 to the 'Midland Counties Herald Office' in Birmingham:

'Notice. The Guardians of the above Union are desirous of placing out as Apprentices a Number of Orphan Boys (who are at present Inmates of the Union Workhouse) to persons of good Character; the Boys will receive a proper supply of Clothing and the Guardians will be at the expense of binding.

Persons desirous of taking such Apprentices are requested to forward their Applications, with a Certificate of respectability from the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Parish in which they reside (post paid) addressed to the Clerk of the Derby Union, 19 Wardwick Derby.'

On 13 March 1840 there were reported to be over 20 boys in the workhouse between the ages of 9 and 15 who could be apprenticed. A report on five of them, who had been apprenticed at Darlaston, was given on 8 June 1841. This stated that 'they were very comfortable in their Situations, they had plenty to eat, good Beds and good Masters and plenty of Work and that they appeared very respectable and healthy.'

The girls were usually sent out as servants. On 24 April 1841 Mary Ann Roe was said to have 'gone out to service' to Mr. Locker, the Manager of the China Manufactory. No more seems to have been reported of her; but on 19 February 1842 a report to the Board said:

'I am sorry to have to report to the Board that Elizabeth Turner who went out to service some Months ago to Mrs. Pickford in Parker Street has been sent back to the Workhouse for her Idle and bad conduct. I have placed her to the Gum scraping until I receive the orders of the Board. The clothes that were provided by the Guardians and also a Gown which her Mistress gave her and other Clothes with 2s. have also been sent back by Mrs. Pickford.'

The children in the workhouse were provided with some education and teachers were employed. On 23 November 1838 the confirmation of the appointment of Miss Nott as school mistress at a salary of '£10 a year with Rations' was requested by the Poor Law Commissioners. This was the same salary as was proposed for the cook on 22 November 1838. The cook, however, was reported on 10 March 1840 to be 'in the habit of getting intoxicated' and a request for her dismissal was made. The salary of the schoolmaster was reported on 16 January 1838 to be '£20 and rations'. On 8 June 1839 it was resolved that boys attended school from '9 to 11 o'clock in the Forenoon, then do indoor Work, Tailoring or Shoemaking from 11 to 12 such as are able—in the Afternoon attend school from 2 to 4 o'clock then do out work in Garden or otherwise from 4 to 5 o'clock in the afternoon.'

On 5 May 1840 the duties of the schoolmaster were approved. They were described as follows:

1 That he do consider the Governor as the head of the Establishment agreeable to the Instructions of the Commissioners Rule 36.

2 That he shall attend to the rising of the Boys at six o'clock in the Morning from 25th March to the 29 September and at seven o'clock the remainder of the Year and see them clean washed for the roll call and to sit down in half an hour after breakfast & the like at supper-time.

3 That he do attend all Meals and superintend the Boys there present and see that they go and return in orderly manner, and generally to superintend them through the day.

4 That he do see that the Boys receive their clean clothes for the Sabbath on the Saturday and that the dirty clothing be returned on Monday Morning for washing, and the Sabbath Clothes laid by in order under his control.'

The schoolmistress was to have duties 'to the like effect as the Schoolmaster.'

On 29 April 1840 the schoolmistress's salary was increased to £18 per annum, and on 17 April 1841 the schoolmaster's salary was raised to '£30 per annum and Rations'. The cook also received an increase on 8 February 1842, bringing her wages to £12 per annum. On 27 December 1842 the chaplain's salary was fixed at £50 per annum. This was a reduction, as on 8 January 1839 the salary for John Wakefield had been fixed at £60, although this was for a weekly morning service, not an alternate morning and afternoon service as in the case of the new chaplain. Wakefield's duties had been laid down as follows:

'One full service every Sunday, Christmas day and Good Friday.

To give a Lecture once during the Week.

To examine the Children weekly and after such examination to record the same and state the progress of the children and the moral and religious state of the Inmates in a Book to be laid before the next Board and insert the date of each attendance.

To administer the sacrament to the sick and any of the paupers as may be desirous of receiving the same at least once every three Months.

To visit the sick and generally to watch over the Morals of the Establishment and perform such other duties as may be from time to time found required.'

On 26 May 1840 the governor, Ratcliffe Gawthorne, had been dismissed for inefficiency and a 'Mr. and Mrs. Webster' were 'elected' in place of the Gawthornes as governor and matron, at a salary of '£80 per annum and maintenance'. On 14 July 1840 the new governor, William Webster, announced certain alterations and improvements in the workhouse:

'I have removed the Aged Women into the Ward occupied by the Able Bodied Women. I have removed the Idiots into the room previously occupied by the aged Women. I find the Old and Infirm men have not had the full Allowance of Pudding and stew allowed as per Diet Table—Nor the Children above 9 years of the quantity of Meat. I shall be glad if the Board will be good enough to say how I shall proceed. I have removed all the young Children into a room converted into a Nursery and appointed an elderly Woman to take care of them.'

The schoolgirls were examined on 20 May 1841 in reading which was found 'much improved' and their 'knitting, sewing and making' was said to be 'very creditable'.

There were 27 girls in the school. The boys were also examined, at the same date, 'in reading and scripture Questions in which they appeared to have improved.' They were, however, declared 'deficient in their Multiplication Table.' In 1842 the Board resolved to set up an infant school in the workhouse. On 23 May 1843 the chaplain reported that 'he had examined the Schools and was satisfied with the reading in each, was much gratified with the Children's Singing and that the House was in excellent order throughout.'

In September 1840 a vaccination committee was formed and 'one contractor' was regarded as sufficient for the Derby Union. Payment of 1s. 6d. for 'successful cases of vaccination' was to be made to the contractor. On 27 October 1840 there were 67 new cases of vaccination reported and 61 were said to be successful. On 17 November there were 20 new cases and 20 successful ones; but on 9 July 1844 the governor reported a return of smallpox, with 18 cases, 1 dead, 'not vaccinated'.

Outdoor relief was rarely granted to able-bodied persons but it was frequently given to the sick and aged and infirm. On 16 June 1837 an order was made for the payment of 2s. 6d. per week to Martha Bracegirdle, an aged and infirm person with no relatives to look after her; and on 4 January 1838 a letter was sent from the Union clerk to the Nuneaton Relieving Officer asking his Board to give 'Widow Bolton such relief as they may see necessary for one Month from this date in case she should remain sick but to give no relief in Case of her being in health.' On 3 May 1839 the number of persons receiving outdoor relief in Derby Union who were under 50 years of age was 41, and none of these was able-bodied. There were 9 lunatics, 22 were sick and the remaining 10 were 'principally imbecile and unable to support themselves.' Where families were able to earn what was considered a reasonable amount, no outdoor relief was granted. Such a case was dismissed on 24 September 1839 when Hannah Clay appeared before the Board, stating that she earned about 1s. per week by washing; her son aged 'near 16' earned 9s. per week; another son earned 1s. 6d. and Emma, aged 7, earned nothing. The Board 'considered it a case they should not relieve out of the house and therefore dismissed it.'

Those who left the workhouse voluntarily were not likely to be re-admitted. A case of this kind occurred on 21 March 1840, when the clerk to the Union wrote to the relieving officer in Darley Dale, saying:

'I forward your account up to last week when Butterley and her child went out of the Workhouse. She applied to be taken in again this day but she was refused, having gone out of her own accord. Your remittance by return will oblige.'

On 1 April 1840 the clerk wrote to the clerk to the Union in Mansfield informing him clearly what the New Poor Law said about outdoor relief:

'Joseph Bellions Case

Your Board must have been aware that it was Contrary to the Order of the Poor Law Commissioners to give outdoor relief to an able bodied person although he might have been entirely out of employ, he will be received together with his Family into our Union Workhouse at any time they may present themselves for an order of admission, but our Auditor would not allow the Item of relief were we to pay it.'

Exceptions, however, were occasionally made, as in the case of the framework knitters.

Life in the workhouse was an unattractive prospect to all but the hardened or the desperate. The governor, in an attempt to prevent misunderstanding, suggested, on 25 February 1839, that the names of the inmates who died in the house should be inserted in the newspapers as was done at Nottingham. He thought 'it would have the tendency of misrepresentation being destroyed.' There was no doubt that the severity of the workhouse discipline acted as a deterrent. On 31 January 1840 the clerk to the Derby Union wrote to his counterpart at Burton-on-Trent:

'Sarah Saunder. Tutbury.

This pauper went out of the Workhouse the following day after she went in. I suppose the House cured her, so no more of her at present.'

One hardship usually imposed was the separation of families, although on 1 January 1839 it was resolved:

'That all Children under four years of age be allowed to sleep with their Mothers and such Children as the

Medical officer see necessary should remain with their parents above that age shall do so on the Medical Man giving his Certificate to the Governor.'

On the other hand the children received some education at a date when most children had none; some books were also available inside the workhouse. On 11 December 1838 a resolution was passed: 'That a Library be establish'd for the use of the poor in the Workhouse. That it be referred to the Education Committee to select the Books and report to the Board.' Medical care, of a sort, was available; and although the inmates were not generally allowed out of the workhouse, it was resolved on 16 July 1839:

'That the old Women be allowed to go into the Garden and the old Men and them going alternately.'

Similarly, it was stated on 23 July 1839:

'That the Boys and Girls go out after the usual School Hours during the Summer Months.'

The atmosphere of the new Victorian workhouse in Derby in the first ten years of its operation, seemed grim and harsh to many. Many of the children absconded, only to be brought back in disgrace; but a few of the inmates expressed their gratitude for the care and shelter of the workhouse. On 23 March 1841 a copy of Ann McGawley's thanks was entered in the Minutes. It must have been a rare testimonial for the workhouse to receive; it had been made orally as follows:

'I wish to express my Gratitude to the Board of Guardians for the kindness I have received during the time I have been in the Workhouse—both from the Governor and Matron. Although I have lost my Child I am anxious to say everything that could be done for it has been—every attention possible paid to it by the Matron.

her
signed Ann X McGawley
mark

It was not unique, however, and on 12 August 1842 Mrs. Rewcastle applied to the Board for a little relief outside the workhouse as she was anxious to establish an infants' school, since she had a little furniture and could live with her daughter until she had found a house for her purpose. Mrs. Rewcastle requested the governor to state on her behalf that she was 'quite comfortable in the house but had now been in a long time, and feeling so much in health' felt that she should support herself by her own industry. She desired the governor to 'thank the Board for the kindness' she had 'experienced in the House.'

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- ² Michael E. Rose, 'The allowance system under the New Poor Law', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. XIX no.3 (Dec. 1966), A. Redford, *The economic history of England 1760–1860* (1960) and J. D. Chambers, *The workshop of the world* (1968), 143.
- ³ Derby Central Library, the records of Derby Poor Law Union.
- ⁴ Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws 1834, 262.
- ⁵ Duncan Bythell, 'The hand-loom weavers in the English cotton industry during the Industrial Revolution: some problems', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. XVII no.2 (Dec. 1964), 351.