

**Swelling Grounds, A history of Hackney Workhouse
(1729-1929) – Jean-Paul Martinon**

Rear Window Publications

1995 ISBN: 0 9521040 4 0

© Jean-Paul Martinon

"The office of Chaplain commits to my charge at the present time 510 souls, the greater number of whom have been called to pass through many varied scenes of trial, sickness, disappointment and distress. Much patience, tenderness and judgment are required in dealing with such persons, to administer in such cases, suitable to each, upon the one hand, 'me cry peace where there is no peace', and upon the other 'make sad those whom we ought rather to console'."

Chaplain of the Hackney Union Workhouse, Letter dated December 18th, 1843, Minute Book no 5, p. 617.

"Conceive a spacious building resembling the palace of a peer, airy, and elevated, and elegant, surrounded by extensive and swelling grounds and gardens. The interior is fitted up with galleries, and workshops. The sun and the air are allowed to enter at every window, the view of the shrubberies and fields, and groups of labourers is unobstructed by shutters or bars; all is clean, quiet and attractive. The inmates all seem to be actuated by the common impulse of enjoyment, all are busy, and delighted by being so."

W.A.F. Browne: "What asylums were, are and ought to be", 1837:229 in Michael Donnelly, *'Managing The Mind'*, Tavistock Publications, London 1983 Tenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners.

Foreword

The Hackney Gazette in June 1994 compared Hackney Hospital, “this 140-year old workhouse,” to “a crumbling Victorian rat pit.” This comparison formed the starting point of this study. It proposes to trace the history of the Hackney Workhouse and hopefully to show that it has never, at least before becoming a general Hospital in 1929, been a rat pit.

Hackney’s workhouse, with its random tales of happy moments and inevitable misfortunes, has a particular history separate from its counterparts in the East End. Unfortunately, having not yet attracted passionate writers to dwell over its history, the amount of information on it is limited. A lot of archives and memories have over the years been lost. The main sources available are the minutes of its various administrations.

It is the particular history found in these particular minutes which is outlined in the following pages. *Swelling Ground* only represents a bird’s eye view over 200 years in the life of a particular institution in London. It does not pretend to be more than that. Its ambition, however, is to become the basis for another writer’s more thorough research, a more scholarly publication.

By being a bird’s eye view, this study covers only the main streams and topographical features which constitute its history. It does not cover all aspects of the work of the Trustees, Overseers, and Guardians of the Hackney and Stoke Newington Parishes. It mainly focuses on their duties towards the administration of Poor Relief and of the workhouse. It maps out the administration which was implemented by the Poor Laws and briefly outlines the steps that led an institution dedicated to fighting poverty to become a local general hospital committed to fighting, or at least dealing with, illness.

Considering the scale and ambition of the project and the shortage of time available to complete it, it is important in this introduction to present exactly which areas have not been covered. With regard to administration, there are no indications in this survey of the Trustees’ or Guardians’ work and commitments to the various children’s homes, schools, churches, alms houses, nursing schools, marriages, funerals, or cemetery management, sewage and lighting contracts, etc. There is no analysis either of their work regarding the vaccination of local paupers, their participation in the establishment of the Easter Hospital, of the local ambulance station or the fire station, not even their participation in the establishment of London Fields or Victoria Park. In other words, this study does not intend to be an exhaustive analysis of the administration of the Hackney Parish, but just a survey of the history of a particular area of administrative work: the running of the workhouse.

In terms of Poor Laws, the only three acts which have shaped its history and which are described here are the Poor Relief Act of 1601, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, and the Metropolitan Poor Law Act of 1867. Both acts are cornerstones in the development of Hackney Workhouse, Infirmary and Hospital. The other Acts (some of which determined massive changes in the life and work of paupers, but which received little attention in Hackney), are briefly presented here and there. There are the famous and various Education Acts (1870-1902), Factory Acts (1819-1901), Trade Union Acts (1871-1913), and other national and local Acts which enhanced the living and working conditions of the British working class. Overall, the choice of legislation has been provided by the history of Hackney Workhouse itself.

This history, as we have already said, was provided by the Minutes of the Trustees, Overseers, and then Guardians of Hackney. These constitute two large sets of documents

and bound books held at the Hackney Archive and at the Greater London Council Record Office.

Overall, this study either offers a precise and detailed account of a small portion of history (which at the time did not represent much, but had huge consequences), or it only briefly touches an enormous area of concern which received a lot of attention at the time, for example, vaccination. This imbalance is inevitable in 100 pages; however, it leaves a hypothetical future writer of the fully unabridged history of the Hackney Workhouse ample space to develop.

Two more points require elucidation here:

The structure used in this study, contrary to what one expects from local history books, does not follow the traditional thematic pattern of chapters. The basis of my structure is exclusively chronological. It starts in 1729 with the Poor House and finishes in 1929 with the Central Institution. This inevitably creates problems, the main ones being repetition and progression. The chronological choice then is justified in its honesty: it follows the path of discovery of documents. In a way the following pages are processed data found between June 6th 1994 and February 12th 1995, in records dated October 30th, 1729 to March 31st, 1929. Any additional material only complements, enhances or highlights the discovery made in these records.

The second point is semiological. Any history book which attempts to cover two century inevitably faces problems of terminology in describing those who are poor and suffer and those who care. It would be anachronistic to use our modern term "service users" in the context of the eighteenth century. This book therefore chooses to describe poor people and people with mental health problems by using the terminology in favour at the particular time under discussion.

Finally, it is necessary to point out that this study ends with an irresolvable paradox: Hackney Workhouse (1729-1929) is the antithesis of Hackney Hospital 1995. While the Workhouse dealt with one Parish (Hackney), one class (paupers), one remedy (relief), one solution (work), Hackney Hospital deals with hundred of nationalities, several social classes, innumerable remedies and therapies and fluctuating solutions. This dichotomy renders the task of anyone writing about the history of Hackney Hospital un bearably daunting experience. Its subject being so dissociated from today's life.

Or is it? Analysed in a different way, Hackney Workhouse is nothing more, nothing less than pre-history. Hackney Hospital is today a psychiatric institution; its "clients" are "service users." Hackney Workhouse was an institution of relief—which is in a way equivalent—and its "clients" were paupers. The disused term "pauper" is defined in the Oxford Dictionary in its edition of 1944 as a person who lives off charity and, specially, off official charity.

To resolve this paradox, the question this book should ask is perhaps this: Does the etymology of the term "service user" rest in the word "pauper"? The answer will not be provided here. What is certain, however, is that the concept service, which forms the basis of Christian charity and social welfare, has not changed. It persists in our brand new concept of "Care in the Community."

Rear Window – Care and Control exhibition
27 June – 5 August 1995
Hackney Hospital, Homerton High Street, London E9

Part 1: Hackney Poor House - 1729-1834

Part 2: Hackney Union Workhouse - 1834-1867

Part 3: Hackney Central Institution - 1867-1930

PART I

**HACKNEY POOR HOUSE
1729-1834**

- 1. Ideologies**
- 2. The Establishment of Hackney's First Poor House**
- 3. The Administration of the Poor House by the Trustees 1729-1834**
- 4. The Poor Rates at Hackney between 1720 and 1837**
- 5. The Poor House Population 1720-1840**
- 6. Outdoor Relief before 1834**
- 7. Health Care in Hackney before 1834**
- 8. Insanity - Overview**
- 9. Insanity at the Poor House**
- 10. Poor Hackney Children 1720-1840**
- 11. Life in the Poor House**

Wednesday June 8th

Ideologies

Before describing the history, structure, and daily life of an institution like the Hackney Poor House, it is important to look at the ideological and legal foundations that set it in place.

1. The idea of “poor relief”:

The idea of poor relief originated in the sixteenth century. At that time, the fact of providing money for the poor was based on local custom un-ratified by Parliament. Each parish had its own system of collection and distribution, which generally took place outside the church. It was the result of the benevolent work of vestrymen and charitable members of the parish. By the turn of the century, there was a general recognition that it was the community, rather than the church or the family that ought to support its poorest members. The concept was new: Relief was a parochial responsibility.

This recognition led to three parliamentary acts, which were to legalise the old form of Christian charity: the Vagrancy Act of 1595 and the Poor Law Relief Acts of 1595 and 1601. These acts provided a legal and uniform system of collection and distribution. The care of the poor became everywhere entrusted to unpaid “Overseers of the Poor”. Their task was to levy a Poor Rate destined to relieve either medically, in money or in kind the impotent or the lame, to settle the able-bodied to work and to apprentice poor children.

These acts did not constitute a radical social reform. They provided small communities as well as major cities with a local tax for the poor.

2. The idea of a “workhouse”:

The real reform will take some sixty years later with the implementation of the notion of workhouse. This notion appeared progressively throughout the seventeenth century. Although the 1595 and 1601 Acts provided that houses to shelter the poor could be built at parish expense on waste or common land, the actual start of the workhouse system did not occur until the beginning of the next century. It needed a more careful legislation and structure.

These were provided by the Settlement Act of 1662, which established that everyone had a parish of settlement, and by the Workhouse Test Act of 1723 (also known as the Knatchbull Act), which provided a structure for the employment of local paupers. Both acts were in fact a major moral reform. They recognised the economic utility of labour discipline provided by settlement and institution, and started the workhouse system, which was to last more than 200 years.

The workhouse was from then onwards defined as a place where the “idle but able-bodied” local paupers were compelled to work. The management of these new institutions was given to unpaid Trustees and supervised by the Overseers of the Poor and the Church Wardens. The establishment of a workhouse therefore meant that parishes were resolving the problem of poverty by providing both food or money outside, and work inside.

In fact, the implementation of such complex system of “legalised charity” was only possible because Tudor England was a country where local authority was not yet bound by central government. It created a unique system which, with the increase in the powers of central government, would become obsolete and prove to be economically disastrous.

Saturday June 25th

The Establishment of Hackney Poor House:

1. Hackney and its first Poor House:

Until the nineteenth Century, Hackney was considered a quiet, healthy and agreeable provincial place three miles from London with one church, three meeting houses, six boarding schools and several alms houses. Since George I, it was a popular suburb amongst tradesmen from London.

The Hackney Poor House has its origins in the first half of the eighteenth Century just after The Knatchbull Act of Parliament of 1722.

It was during the winter of 1728-29 that the vestry of Hackney Parish rented a house on the north side of Homerton High Street. Little is known of this first Poor House. Local observers of the time give it the image of a country cottage. It was rented from John Evans and progressively repaired by the Parish. It housed 15 paupers - the local poor.

2. A new building:

In 1741, the vestry moved its paupers (for unspecified reasons, probably due to an increase in their numbers) to its present location, on the south side of Homerton High Street, to a large house overlooking the river Lea, belonging to George Milbourne. It housed 30 paupers.

It was a Tudor cottage surrounded by functional sheds. A local historian described the building as having "gable ends and quaint corners and facing a tavern called 'Adam & Eve'"¹. The main building had numerous tall chimneys and narrow roofs. There was an inner courtyard paved with stones and a wooden fence. This courtyard was often threatened to be cut in half. A Report given on August 5th 1822 by a Trust Committee claims that "there have been a lot of illegitimate children that have been begotten and born in the House, and therefore recommend that the communication between the female and male wards should be forthwith prevented and that a wall should be created from the Master's house down the middle of the Yard to the building at the bottom." This recommendation was never approved by the Trustees for practical reasons. The Yard stayed the same until its demolition in 1841.

Overall, the general appearance of the building is the one of functionality: a house in which to sleep and to work.

3. Inventories and Inspections:

There are numerous description in the Minutes Book of the old Poor House.

An inspection of the Poor House held on March 25th 1834, provides us with a clear view of each room: There was a school room for boys and another one for girls, close to the women's ward; there was a combing room and a knitting and needle room. Next to the infirmary with its two wards, there was a nursery and a mother's room. The building facing the high street housed the Master of the Poor House, the men's and women's dining rooms, and next to the main entrance there was the shoemaker's shop.

Behind the men's ward was the stone yard. Between the wards, at the end of the inner court yard was the Manufacture of the Poor House. And finally, tucked in a corner were the

“privies”. A Trust Committee once reported that the privies on the “women’s side are wholly exposed to general observation (...) from the men and boys common and is in the most filthy state and without any division of the seat.”

According to an Inventory of the Poor House led by the Parish in 1764, there were exactly 48 beds (most of them flock beds). The average room housed ten paupers. The kitchen had a large range of pewter dishes, plates, brass kettles, lead tobacco pots, copper pans, irons, lead weight, heaters, candlesticks, boxes, pots, &c. The wash house had two washing copper forms, seven water/wash tubs, clothes horses, wheel barrows but no heaters. The inventory does not, however, give the condition of the objects described.

All through the eighteenth Century and until the change of legislation in 1834, the Poor House was under constant pressure to open up new sheds, to buy more land to shelter the ever-growing number of paupers who would rise from 30 when the Poor House first opened in 1741 to 380 in 1834.

Wednesday June 19th

The administration of the Poor House before 1834:

1. The Master and Matron of the Poor House:

The central figure in the Poor House was the Master of the House. He was appointed by the Trustees after a rigorous selection procedure. The Trustees generally looked for a married couple who could read and write, who would be severe and respectful of the rules and regulations and who would create a pleasant, but hard-working environment in the Poor House. The reason for the appointment of a couple was simple: The man dealt with male inmates, the woman with females and children.

The Master's tasks were to control the admission and release procedure, to provide work, shelter and food. The Matron's tasks were to look after pregnant women and the sick and to educate children.

There is a very precise account of the Master's duties in a Report by a Trust Committee of May 27th, 1834: "The Master should consider himself placed in a situation of great importance and conscientiously perform every part of his trust. He will have to discharge all the various duties of a Christian. He must be a faithful servant and a good master, humane and attentive to the sick, and act as a father towards those poor children committed to his care." The Report then recommends the Master to be "an example, to never leave the premises, to admit anyone sick without an order from the Trustees, to ensure that everyone goes to Church and to always consult the Clerk".

The Matron was, as expected, totally subservient to her husband. Although her role was crucial in maintaining a good atmosphere and order in the Poor House, her position is nearly non-existent in the Minutes. Only once are her duties clearly outlined: She had to check the clothing of all inmates, check the needle and weaving work by female inmates, educate the girls, make a good stock of garments and other pieces of clothing, rule the small Infirmary and the kitchen, give orders to nurses and cooks and always check that the meat was properly salted.

The possibility of a career improvement for either the Matron or the Master was close to none. The only option was to become Trustees themselves, but the fact of not being able to earn a living was not an appealing prospective. (Only one, Mr Fieldwick, Master for 10 years (1810-1820) was appointed Trustee at his retirement.)

Above this crucial position were the Trustees, who were liable to the government, the Overseers of the Poor, who were generally local benefactors and the Church Warden, who ruled over the spiritual life of the Parish.

2. The Trustees and Overseers:

The Trustees generally were local gentlemen interested in politics and desirous to have their say in the administration of the Parish. Their numbers vary through the centuries. In Hackney, from 6 in 1716 to more than 72 in 1833. Until the Poor Law Amendment Act, the system used to rule the Trustees remained almost identical.

It was originally put in place by a Resolution in a "Bread Book" of the Poor House in 1792. The Trustees decided then to establish a system of rotation of Trustees in charge of the management of the Poor House and of outdoor paupers. The rotation proposed clearly marked the Parish's preference for large numbers of Trustees: The 34 Trustees were

divided in committees, each in charge of four meetings a month, every Saturday. Any Trustee who was unable to attend a Saturday meeting when in rotation was required to find another Trustee to attend the meeting in his place.

These Committees were complemented with a series of sub-committees: for surveys and general purposes, for the examination of accounts, for the employment of labourers, &c.

Any change in the history of the Poor House was taken by these committees, their reports and resolutions. As a resolution of November 9th, 1799 shows: "On account of the high price of provision, that a committee of 5 Trustees be appointed to take into consideration what mode may be best to adopt for the regulating and victualling of the Poor during the approaching season."

With the Trustees stood the Overseers of the Poor. Their main activity, as is shown in the next chapter, was the levying of the rate. Otherwise, they supervised the activities of the Trustees and generally made sure that the relief offered indoors was not disproportionate compared to the outdoor pittance. They served as guarantors of the fairness of the relieving system. They were always present, but with a less active role than Church Wardens or Trustees.

3. Other Positions in the Poor House:

The Church Wardens had a very powerful role in the Poor House. They could order the expulsion of paupers if they estimated that their conduct was unchristian. (An example of this can be found in the Minutes of November 29th 1816, where a Church Warden forced the Trustees to expel a pauper "deserving excommunication.") They generally made sure that the Parish paupers received all the necessary religious education and went to church every Sunday. However, their role changed drastically over the centuries, from a very powerful position in the eighteenth century, where they were actually the initiators of the Poor Relief system, giving out weekly allowances to the deserving poor, to an honorific position in the bureaucratic, centralised 1834 system.

The other positions in the Poor House administration relate to the other functions of the Trustees of the Poor: the Clerk, who was paid a large sum of £400 a year in 1834 for liaising between the Poor House Master and the Trustees and for generally representing the Trustees at Parliament or at court, recording the Minutes and keeping the accounts; the Collector, who administered the Poor Rate (amongst others) and who was paid 3 pence in the Pound per rate received in the 1830's; and the Master Manufacturer in charge of the Poor House's Manufacture and the education of apprentices.

Thursday June 30th

The Poor Rates at Hackney:

1. The new Tax:

As we have seen, the Poor Rates were established by the Elizabethan Poor Acts of 1595, 1601 and 1662. These Acts entrusted the Overseers to levy a tax on each household in the Parish, called the Poor Rate.

This Poor Rate was yet another tax for the local inhabitant, alongside Church Rates, Police Rates, &c. On the other hand, the Poor Rate relieved him of the embarrassment of not fulfilling his Christian duties: in other words, of not giving money to beggars at the end of the Church service. The Rate was paid by every "household" in Hackney, i.e., anyone who possessed land. This could mean anything: a domestic house, offices, agricultural land, dwelling houses, mills, factories, warehouses, mines, iron works, canals, &c. Later the Parish extended the application of the Poor Rate to include Water and Gas Boards for passing pipes through Hackney (1835). The total number of paying householders in Hackney rose from 130 in 1716 to more than 2,000 in 1834.

The first trace of the Hackney Poor Rate appears in 1716 in a small leather bound Parish Book. On its first page it is written that the Poor Rate is levied "for the necessary relief of the lame, impotent, old, blind and other poor of the Parish. (43.Eliz.Ce)"

2. The aim of the new Tax:

Practically, the amount levied was destined to pay the costs of running a Poor House and of relieving outdoor paupers by giving them bread and medication, and in winter the rough comforts of the casual ward.

Its other aim was to establish the local rate per pauper. The balance between the income and the expenses against the number of paupers provides us with the local rate per pauper per week: 1 shilling and six pence in the Pound (1746). In other words, if the Parish relieved 30 paupers, as it did for example in 1746, it would have to provide £3.17.6 per week. Over a year the Parish expenses in outdoor relief would be £156, less than a quarter of the total levied in a year (£420). This average rate in maintaining the poor will increase steadily to 3 shillings and 1/3 in 1818 and to a maximum of 6 shillings in 1834.

3. Practical problems with the new Rate:

The main problem encountered by the Overseers of the Poor was to make sure that all householders in the Parish paid their Rates. In the Overseers' Minutes the list of reports from the Treasurer complaining about difficulties in collecting the Rate is endless. The same is true for the numbers of appeals to lower the rate.

This difficulty in collecting the Rate forced the Parish to perform regular surveys of the number of rate payers. The first survey was conducted in August 1813 and is described in the Minutes for that month. It establishes that out of 3,900 houses in Hackney, only 1,600 paid the Rate. The average rate for those Hackney rate payers varies considerably according to the income and the house occupied: a normal householder would pay a Poor Rate of roughly £4 per annum. The Overseers started complaining about this low figure, claiming that, unlike other Parishes in the neighbourhood, Hackney did not have enough powers to pressurise local householders to pay the Rate.

4. Some temporary solutions:

The Parish took three measures to force their parishioners to pay the Rate.

The first one was to charge interest and annuities on unpaid Poor Rates.

The second one was to introduce a Police Station in Hackney (1830). The station was situated in an old building adjoining the old church yard and was designed to threaten anyone who refused to pay their rates. It enforced an old local Act of June 1826 that allowed the Rate Collector to summon a County Constable when a rate payer refused to pay the Rates.

And the third one was to call for a special meeting to establish a petition signed by all the rate-paying householders, requesting from Parliament an act that would give the Treasurer of the Parish the power to obtain payment of the Rate from all householders. The main system of enforcement requested in this petition would force householders' tenants paying less than £16 per annum in rent to pay the Poor Rate. This increase in the powers of the Overseers of the Poor was destined to enlarge the amount offered to paupers, but also to consolidate the Overseers' powers. Unfortunately, unlike Bethnal Green or Shoreditch, Hackney was refused the increase in power. The Police Station had already been enough of a concession. Two months after receiving the petition, Parliament refused to change the local Act. One can only guess that, Hackney being a wealthier Parish, this increase was considered unnecessary.

Saturday July 9th

The Poor House Population 1737-1837:

1. Hackney's Working Class:

At about the turn of the century, the flight from sooty, ever-spreading London caused a rapid increase in Hackney's population, and the eighteenth century village surrounded by cornfields quickly became a busy suburban town. The real industrial Hackney started when the Lea Bridge Mills (1791) and the Silk Mills at the Wick (1811) were established, hiring highly skilled craftsmen.

In pre-industrial times, urban skilled and unskilled workers like those who worked in the craft streets slowly disappeared to create a single working class. In London, however, it is evident that certain craft streets and districts remained strongly defined throughout Victorian times, thus preventing the formation of a single urban working class. Hackney kept up that tradition until the end of the nineteenth century. It is roughly at that time that the old generation specialising in tile-kilns, brick fields, calico-grounds and the throwing and carping of silk disappeared.

2. Hackney's paupers:

Beyond the traditional imagery (sturdy beggars, mendicants, &c.), the only reliable source comes from the Poor House records: These show that all through the eighteenth century, Hackney's poor population only represented an average of 150 people. This figure will obviously increase in the nineteenth century, bringing dramatic changes to the relief system.

In a report by a Committee formed by the Trustees of the Poor of November 1822, the people of the Poor House were divided into the following classes:

- "1. Men and women who are of good disposition, regular in behaviour and decent in their dress
2. Men and women of irregular behaviour, not clean in their person and of vagrant disposition
3. Mothers and their young children
4. Boys and girls capable of work
5. Children of both sexes not capable of work
6. Lying-in women under the care of a nurse
7. Sick women and men to be placed in a ward where they may have free air and the care of nurses."

Although the vagueness of the seventh category is worrying, the classification resembles the ones made in other poor or work houses.

It is part of the myth of workhouses that the number of inmates rose consistently ever since they were created. If a survey is conducted, it is indeed obvious that the number of paupers had risen. However, one must not forget that at the same time the urban population grew steadily all through the period (400 householders in 1716 against 35,000 in 1837) and that the conditions of admittance to the Poor House became more flexible. So here is the first set of dreaded figures taken from the various Minutes and Register Books of Hackney Poor House:

Adult Indoor Admittance:	1716: 56	1793: 77
	1742: 49	1800: 125
	1756: 56	1810: 203
	1764: 58	1822: 330
	1774: 75	1834: 350
	1786: 74	1837: 410
Adult Outdoor Relief:	1764: 31	1811: 120
	1793: 70	1821: 380
	1798: 87	1831: 543

These figures do not indicate the exact number of paupers of Hackney Parish, but only the number of admittances and persons relieved outdoors (it excludes vagrants and those confined in hospitals or asylums).

The most important reason for this increase comes from the growth of the migrating population, from country to cities, but also within cities. The Act of Settlement of 1662 forced anyone seeking relief at a workhouse to wait for 40 days in the Parish or to serve as apprentice at a local craftsman for 2 years before applying for relief. This Act proved an administrative burden for parishes. It implied a new Register: the "Sworn Affidavits as to Settlement Book". It also implied endless letters, recommendations, expulsion orders... The cost of removing people from one parish to another was immense, especially in Hackney. In a report of a Trust Committee of May 24th, 1830, the Trustees underlined the fact that "the humanity of the Trustees and officers and the superior treatment paupers receive from this Parish is well known, (and that) this is a great inducement with many persons to desire their settlement to be in it." The decision to give relief to a "foreign" pauper was a complicated one. Most of the applicants pretended or proved that they had relatives in the Parish. Most of them were refused or were only admitted for a very short period and then discharged.

The Register Book of Hackney Poor House recording the admission of inmates, of which very little has been preserved, shows the age and sex of the inmates and the length of stay. In the eighteenth century, the records show a rate of 1 man to 4 women. The nineteenth century saw a reduction of this average, probably due to the increase in urban male orphans, but the difference between men and women stayed the same. In the 1760's there was an average of 25 women, 6 men, 10 girls and 9 boys admitted or readmitted in the Poor House every week.

A Report of a Trust Committee provides us with an insight into the average age of inmates: On June 25, 1821, the committee reported that a new building for the poor had been built in the Poor House Grounds dedicated to housing married couples. This report indicates the age group of the 6 indoor couples:

Mr. and Mrs Rose, 69 and 63 respectively,	admitted in 1818
Mr. and Mrs Ward, 72 and 49	" " in 1813
Mr. and Mrs Lloyd, 63 and 57	" " in 1816
Mr. and Mrs Graig, 60 and 60	" " in 1812
Mr. and Mrs Berry, 70 and 68	" " in 1818
Mr. and Mrs Briggs, 65 and 56	" " in 1819

As a matter of fact, these couples were of great concern to the Poor House Trustees. In the same report, the Committee expressed their opinion that "the management of this part of the Establishment may be better left to the discretion of the Weekly Board, and that in the

Rear Window – Care and Control exhibition

27 June – 5 August 1995

Hackney Hospital, Homerton High Street, London E9

mean time, the Master should take great caution in future admissions of married couples into the House.”

Friday July 15th

Outdoor Relief before 1834:

Amongst the 150 Hackney paupers, half of them sought outdoor relief.

1. Outdoor treatment:

Before the 1834 Poor Law Act, the Overseers provided relief indoors for unemployed able-bodied paupers, medical relief indoors and outdoors, and relief outdoors for anyone from the Parish who needed bread, money or a shelter for the night.

This last form of relief represents, in a way, the unemployment benefit of today, and not unlike today, was a major subject of controversy. The main topics under discussion were who could apply for outdoor relief and who couldn't, what form the relief should take, and what the Parish had to gain from such a flexible form of charity.

In theory anyone in the eighteenth century could claim outdoor relief, provided they lived in their Parish "and had good causes to claim for it." This flexibility is shown in a Poor House record of 1756 where the Parish marked out two types of paupers deserving a little help: the "Poor at large" and the "Poor being sacrament money".

2. Forms of Outdoor relief:

The main form of outdoor relief was in money. The first Outdoor Relief Record Book in Hackney dates from 1723, six years before the establishment of the Poor House. At that time, relief was given out by the Church Warden. The average number of "relieved" persons was 50 all through the second half of the eighteenth century. Most of them appear over and over again throughout the years, every Saturday, at the same hour (10am) with touching punctuality.

The second form of outdoor relief was in bread or linen. In a report by a Trust Committee in the Minutes of January 23, 1815, it is stated that the outdoor bread allowances for casual poor were to be reduced and controlled: reduced so as to keep the cost of outdoor relief to a minimum, and controlled to avoid false or double representation. Sometimes the relief was in linen. For example, in the Minutes of August 5th 1793, "Sarah Dodson was relieved with an apron, a shift and a handkerchief."

The third form of outdoor relief was night shelters for the casual poor. These paupers were confined, especially in winter, for the night in the famous "casual wards". These wards only admitted "homeless" people for a temporary period (generally one or two days). At Hackney, the Minutes provide us with great insight: on August 5th, 1822, the Trust Committee reported that the walls and fences were not secure enough, and that there had been cases where outdoor paupers had entered the premises without the Master's authorisation with the aim of taking shelter for the night. The Committee then urged the Trustees to either appoint a night watchman or to rebuild the walls surrounding the Poor House. Such decisions show the growing concern of the Poor House Trustees and Overseers to separate the various forms of relief: Fiduciary, Casual and Indoors.

3. Statistics and Incidences:

The Outdoor Relief records show the difference in the number of women and men seeking relief. Over less than 100 years, between 1753 (when the differences in sex first appear in the Books) and 1834, the average number of women applying for outdoor relief was 30, the

average number of men was 12. To these figures we need to add an average number of 15 children of both sexes. The large proportion of pauper women in the Parish is altogether not surprising; living longer, women had to suffer the burden of widowhood (which is often associated with poverty) and living in a patriarchal society, women had to suffer the burden of temporary unemployment more than men.

These records also provide us with the age groups of the persons relieved. For the same period (1753 to 1834), the average age for both women and men is 60, the youngest being a one-year-old orphan and the oldest 94.

Over the years, this system of outdoor relief, as it is examined in the chapter relating the incidents before the new Poor Law of 1834, increased to such levels that the Parish could no longer keep track of who deserved to be relieved. An example of this problem is given in a recommendation of January 23rd, 1832, where the Trustees allowed the Master of the Poor House to relieve "casual cases between the weekly meetings of the Committee and to report such cases in a (now lost) Record Book". Another example of this is given some eight months later, when the Trustees for a time considered the "expediency and practicality of relieving the poor from more than one part of the Parish." (October 8th, 1832)

The abolition of the Outdoor Relief System by the Poor Law Amendment Act in November 1834 did not include the abolition of the casual wards. In a letter from the Poor Law Commissioners to Hackney Parish of November 1834 we are reassured that "the Act was passed not for the purpose of abolishing the necessary relief to the indigent, but for preventing various illegal and injurious practices." It is precisely the lack of these "illegal" practices that will call for an amendment of the law and the reintroduction of the Outdoor relief system in 1844.

Saturday July 16th

Health Care in Hackney before 1834:

One of the duties of the Trustees of the Poor of Hackney was to look after its sick paupers. The first local act dealing with such problems was passed in 1750 when the Trustees decided to add to the Poor House an Infirmary.

This infirmary constitutes the foundation stone of Hackney Hospital. Until the mid-nineteenth century it will only represent two sick wards and an “extra room”: one for men, one for women and children and a small room for “lunatics”. In addition to these two wards, exclusively reserved for inmates of the Poor House, the Infirmary also provided an outdoor medical service for paupers of Hackney who could not afford the visit of a doctor.

1. The Hackney Poor House Infirmary:

The Infirmary is very rarely described in the Minutes of the Poor House. A glimpse of its organisation only appears occasionally:

The admittance to the Infirmary of the Poor House was conducted either by the Matron, if the sick person was an inmate, or by the Trustees, with approval of the Medical Attendant, if it was a new case. The new cases were recorded in a special Register Book, held by the Matron and signed by the Trustees and the Church Warden. The first and only register left, which covers only 5 years (1759-63) gives us the types of illnesses that forced local paupers to seek asylum at the Poor House’s Infirmary before 1834: “Bedridden (sic), Idiot, Lame, Aged, Suffering from cancer, Suffering from Sore Eyes, Sick and Crazy, Delirious, &c.”

The majority of cases were classified “aged”. This shows the actual use of the Infirmary: to provide, outside the alms house system also offered by the Parish, a “geriatric” asylum for “senile” paupers. The Register provides us also with the age and sex of the sick paupers. Over 5 years, the average age is 67 and the proportion of male to female is 1 to 4. Here again, the large number of female paupers is understandable considering the difference in the mortality rates between male and female at the time.

The Medical Attendant of the Poor House was the only person allowed to give medicine in the House. In a letter written by the Medical Attendant of the time, Mr. Hare (just before he died in 1832), we are told that the average pay for a Poor House doctor was £100 per annum, that the duties always included outdoor medical relief (covering a specific area and a set number of households, spreading over Kingsland, Stoke Newington and Clapton in our case). The enormity of the task and the smallness of the pay made the position a gruesome and purely charitable form of activity.

In a Committee Report of January 13th, 1833, we are given the exact list of the Medical Attendant’s duties: “To attend the Poor House everyday, to visit the patients requiring medical assistance, to supply the necessary medicine, to give direction for future treatment, to keep account of all cases, to attend the Poor House every Wednesday from 11am to 1 pm (for outdoor relief on site), to keep at his own expenses a proper supply of medicine in the Poor House, to record all cases of death and to call for a surgeon when needed.”

Besides the Medical Attendant, the management of the Poor House’s Infirmary was exclusively conducted by the Matron, the Master’s Wife. Until the mid-nineteenth century, there seemed to be no special qualification required to attend the sick paupers at Hackney Infirmary. Perhaps for this reason, the complaints are numerous: A Trust Committee on November 29th, 1822, reports in the Minutes that the sick wards were never visited by the

Master or Matron and that the inmates were left without being looked after and that the Master “did never acquainted himself with their wants.”

The ones really acquainting themselves with the patients’ “wants” were the Nurses. There is a precise account of the Nurses’ duties in the same Report: “Wash and comb their hair, put them in bed early, teach them to pray at night and day, wash their feet once a week, mend their clothes, give them the medicine ordered by the Medical Attendant, air the linen as often as circumstances require, remove corpses.”

2. Outdoor Medical Relief:

The Outdoor medical relief was always a source of problems for the Parish. Not unlike cash relief, the questions were: Who was to receive free medicine, how ill had an outdoor pauper to be to claim relief, who could diagnose the state of illness, &c. The following examples provide us with an insight into the health care system used in Hackney in the early nineteenth century:

First of all a plague of Small Pox. In a Trust Committee Report investigating the ravages of Small Pox in Hackney, it is said that in 1820, 712 people died in Hackney of this disease. And this number was threatening to increase. Mr. Hare, the Poor House Medical Attendant, complains about the enormity of his task: “The average number of sick poor had been during the last year upwards 30 per week.” (January 28th, 1821). Another Trust Committee report of February 24th, 1821, shows concern “that the labouring poor who suffer the most from the disease do not receive the benefit of vaccination” and recommends that the Trustees make vaccination compulsory for all paupers who present themselves at the Infirmary. This report is followed by the history of the Small Pox vaccine and several arguments in favour of the compulsory vaccine, giving the death rates since its introduction: 2,000 deaths in 1810, 803 in 1817 and finally 712 in 1820. (Later in the nineteenth century paupers were sent to the Small Pox Hospital, which in return required from the Guardians a £1 fee for admission.)

Secondly, a plague of Cholera. Cholera arrived in Hackney in 1831, ten years after the epidemic of Small Pox. In a letter, the Privy Council Officer announced the need to take drastic measures to prevent the introduction of the disease and the establishment of a Board of Health set up by the Vestry Clerks of the different parishes within the District of the Police Office. A letter from the Secretary of the Newington Dispensary shows that most cholera cases (in the area) “arose from various local causes such as the absence of all proper drainage from accumulated filth from foul cesspool water and other similar nuisances.” The Medical Attendant, in answering this letter, reported that “the neighbourhood is not an unhealthy one, by any means, nor is it habitually infected with malaria.”

These examples show the importance of the role played at the time by the Infirmary’s outdoor Medical Relief. If the local Poor House “doctor” was to administer the vaccine to all paupers of the Parish or to order the creation of a proper sewage system, it shows that this was the only institution in the neighbourhood to do so. The Medical Attendant served as the local health authority, dealing with matters as varied as providing a remedy for a cold and designing a new sewage system for the Parish.

The importance of the Poor House Medical Attendant is confirmed in a report from a Trust Committee on May 28th, 1821, in which it is declared that the administration of medicine from the Poor House Infirmary to parishioners is an essential Parochial activity. However, the report limits this activity by stating that the cost of each poor person’s recovery to the parish should not exceed 3 shillings and 6 pence per week. And the main recommendation

to the Trustees carried on: “give medicine to the ones he thought needed it and refuse in all cases when he did not think them really needed.”

b. The tasks of the Medical Attendant outdoors:

This leads us to ask who this Medical Attendant, Mr. Hare, was and what qualifications were required to fulfil his obligations. In a report conducted ten years later, in June 1831, and reported in the Minutes, the Trustees recommended redefining the tasks of the Medical Attendant. The present one, Mr. Hare, then aged 71, and his son assistant aged 18, were to be the last not to require the qualifications detailed here:

“[The Poor House’s Medical Attendant’s] duties are reduced to only give medicine to paupers from Homerton and Mare Street, [his] annual salary (renewable every three years) will be of £100 per annum plus 7 shillings and 6 pence for each midwifery case. [He] should be a married man of good character and have been resident housekeeper in the Parish for not less than 3 years and [he] should be a member of one of the Royal Colleges of Surgeons.”

The change of status and the geographical limitation of the duty highlights the growing concern over the expansion of the Parochial medical responsibilities of the Parish for its poor. It will end up with a local Act passed on January 5th, 1833, where it is noted that one medical attendant is not enough for Hackney and that the Medical Attendant of the Poor House, who is also in charge of Homerton and Mare Street, should only concentrate on the inmates of the Poor House.

This foresees the change that occurred through the new regime imposed by the Commissioners of England and Wales and the Board of Guardians in 1837, when the Parish was divided into six and then nine medical districts.

Sunday July 17th

Insanity - XVIII - XIX Century - Overview

It is very difficult to establish how many people lived with mental health problems in Hackney in the nineteenth century. It is even more difficult to find out what sort of “illnesses” they might have been suffering from. Between the paupers who had “lost reason” after the death of a relative, or after the occurrence of a dramatic event, and the paupers with real mental health problems, the line at the time is a thin one.

To try to understand what was going on in Hackney when there was no County Asylum, no monitoring of what was once considered a form of deviance, it is imperative to analyse first the general social and legal changes concerning insanity that occurred all through the nineteenth century. This will then force us to see the consequences of the various changes in the law regarding insanity for Hackney.

First of all, the wider set of causes relating to the confinement of the mad in the eighteenth century.

1. General causes for the Reform:

As is well known, the eighteenth century saw a dramatic change in the perception of madness. For the first time, the “insane” population was defined in less than 100 years as a “problem” population, a population that needed to be looked after, monitored and controlled. It is therefore not surprising that within workhouses the insane also needed to be separated and kept confined apart.

There are generally two sets of general causes given for this incarceration. The first set explains the confinement of lunatics by referring to the increase in urbanisation, the rise of state responsibility and the progress of science. This view is the one adopted by traditional historians specialising in the history of psychiatry. The second set of causes, which were explored in the late 1960s and of which Michel Foucault is the most famous protagonist, claims that the confinement of lunatics is due to a change in the perception of Reason and Unreason. The eighteenth century saw a drastic reappraisal of what was right and what was wrong, reassessing the values prescribed by the old faith and redefining traditional values. As Foucault could have put it, the Age of Reason came to terms with Unreason.

Others attributed the sudden confinement of lunatics to a desire originating in the middle-classes to put into practice the values explored by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. If one tries to elucidate, without justifying what happened in the eighteenth century, all these various explanations are equally valid and none of them can be separated from the other.

So after a century of trying to redefine the concept of madness and poverty, several Parliamentary Acts were ready to establish a system of care and control.

2. Parliamentary Investigations and Acts, 1815-1845:

The first Parliamentary Inquiry (1815-16) established the situation and proposed a new view of the problem and a possible solution. The main focus of the inquiry was to establish the conditions of inmates in madhouses, charity asylums and workhouses. Overall, the situation was critical: The licensing of madhouses needed controlling and, as a consequence, the poor lunatic lived in horrendous conditions.

a. The 1828 Lunacy Act:

After several parliamentary debates, an Act was finally passed: The 1828 Lunacy Act. This Act is the first one to indirectly abolish the old family-based response to madness. All through the Middle Ages and up to the end of the seventeenth century, the “insane” were either confined in special “psychiatric” institutions like Bethlem, or, in the majority of cases, looked after by their relatives or tutors. There was no such thing as an asylum for insane paupers before the nineteenth century.

Because of the socio-economic constraints imposed by nineteenth century industrialisation, the 1828 Act served to define the “insane” as non-productive individuals incapable of sustaining themselves. They were therefore required to leave the economically burdened households who supported them and seek outdoor relief.

Under this new law, once outside, the “insane” were straight away recognised by Parishes as worse than the idle or unemployed person, worse than orphans, and were either sent to madhouses or, if already linked with a workhouse inmate and of moderate nature, accepted in the workhouse but confined away from all able-bodied idle individuals. But this was rarely the case. The workhouses were specifically designed to deter the able-bodied undeserving poor from seeking relief, so that within its walls the strictest regard for economy was highly functional. The insane in workhouses were the least attractive “client group” and the most difficult to maintain. In the traditional classification, they were the last group of deviants a Parish had to differentiate. The first three traditional ones were: able-bodied workers vs. able-bodied unemployed, able-bodied unemployed vs. idle people, and finally idle people vs. lunatics. The fourth differentiation was the separation of moderately insane people left to wander in the workhouse from acute lunatics sent to county asylums. The reasons behind the structuring of this heterogeneous unwanted population have to do with an increase in the insane population - which incidentally increased all throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries at a far more rapid rate than the general population of the time.

Above all, besides acknowledging the need for county asylums (and opening one in Hanwell), the 1828 Lunacy Act served to classify the various categories of deviants and to license madhouses. The Lunacy Asylum Act of 1845 would serve to confine them in centrally controlled institutions.

b. The 1845 Lunacy Asylum Act:

This Act forced counties to provide adequate asylum accommodation for its pauper lunatic population. This enforcement -which took more than 10 years to be actually completed- was considered a salubrious and wise financial investment in the solution of the “problem of insanity”. The main achievement was that to retain lunatics in Workhouses wasn’t a salutary solution; it did not provide a medically controlled framework. So the Lunacy Act of 1845 forced workhouses throughout the country to get rid of their unwanted and costly pauper lunatics. “By the turn of the century, a local Metropolitan Union could save up to 60% of its monetary obligations to maintain paupers if they were transferred to county asylums”.²

The confinement of the insane in Asylums or in Workhouse Infirmaries, and the emergence of a new profession (Psychiatrists), are part of a broader moral architectural plan which fought to attempt to moralise the dangerous and the defective; in other words, the Other. However, whether or not one takes the revisionists of Psychiatry History “a la lettre” or not, the fact remains that Medical Attendants and Workhouse Matrons looking after lunatics did little more than act as caretakers of custodial dumping institutions, in which the

relationship with the patients was based on the abolition of his or her own reasoning capacity.

With the turn of the century and the abolition of the Workhouse system came the new concept of neurosis and the advent of psychoanalysis, allowing mad-doctors to practice outside the asylum system, in out-patient clinics and in office-based practices, thus enlarging the scope of the profession and therefore its authority in dealing with the insane.

Thursday July 14th

Insanity at Hackney Poor House:

One of the first acknowledgments of the presence of “lunatics” in the Parish came from an enquiry led by local Parishes during the Parliamentary Enquiries of 1815-16. The Hackney representative of this local enquiry complementing the national one was Mr. L. Taylor. After a meeting of several parish representatives of the County of Middlesex, held at the Queen’s Tavern in Holborn, he reported that it was recommended that the Middlesex Parishes “will soon contemplate a portion of a bill for the erection of a gaol and of a county lunatic asylum”. The total cost of such institutions would be £200,000 for the gaol and £150,000 for the Asylum.

The clerk of the Hackney House Committee answered that such an expense was “premature and unnecessary ... and that the Trustees feel that the Parish lunatic paupers were principally maintained at Mr. Warburton’s House in Bethnal Green [which could hold as many as 570 patients], at as moderate an expense and received as much care and attention as it was possible for persons in their unhappy condition, and the Parish officer and all the Trustees were highly satisfied with their treatment.” This answer was quickly followed by a resolution on March 26th, 1827, stating that “following the fact that a large number of parishes in the county of Middlesex were perfectly satisfied with the treatment of their pauper lunatics, [we] therefore deem the establishment of a county asylum uncalled for and unnecessary.”

Unfortunately, against their recommendation, the asylum was eventually built in 1831. Middlesex, like the majority of counties in the country, had its own asylum, at Hanwell, before 1834.

This first acknowledgment helps us to map out the situation at Hackney regarding insanity. At the turn of the century and until the establishment of a proper “psychiatric institution” at the end of the nineteenth century, the Parish “lunatics” were either sent to the local madhouse or asylum or were kept within the Poor House grounds. Hackney lunatics were, until the mid-nineteenth century, sent to the following institutions: The private mad-house of Mr. Warburton’s in Bethnal Green (one of the four he privately owned), the private mad-house of Sir John Miles in Hoxton, Aubin & Co in Camberwell and, from 1831, the Middlesex County Asylum of Hanwell (now St. Bernard’s Wing, Ealing Hospital).

1. The Hackney “lunatics” sent to asylums:

As soon as a pauper was diagnosed by the Medical Attendant as a “lunatic”, the Parish had two options: either keep the person in the Poor House —which was costly— or send him or her to a lunatic asylum and pay regular pensions for maintenance —which was less expensive. There are several examples of paupers being sent under a Trust resolution to local madhouses.

A letter dating from 1834 from the Superintendent of Mr. Warburton’s Madhouse in Bethnal Green gives the number of Hackney “lunatics” under his control as 70. These paupers were kept at the Asylum at Parish expense. In 1838, the Guardians of the Poor paid for the maintenance of Hackney pauper lunatics an average £54 to the County Asylum at Hanwell, £2 to Mr. Warburton and £1 to Sir John Miles in Hoxton, and for the maintenance of Stoke Newington’s pauper lunatics, £19 to the County Asylum and £1 to Mr. Warburton.

Every Trust Account Book, and later every Guardian Account Book, lists these amounts with great precision, often followed by investigative reports. An example of such an

investigation is given by the Church Warden to the Trustees after a visit to the asylum at Hanwell and to Warburton's House in Bethnal Green: The Church Wardens "found that the Parish patients at Hanwell were taken good care of and were as comfortably provided for as could be expected, that the arrangements are excellent and that we only observed one thing: we suggest that more blinds for the purpose of keeping the sun from the apartments on the south side should be installed ... but overall we highly approved of the care and treatment of the parish's patients at the lunatic asylum of Bethnal Green [who] appeared as comfortable as their state would allow." (August 24th, 1835) This state of affairs will change dramatically after the Amendment Act.

Other sources provide us with a relevant insight into another of those famous madhouses used by Hackney to look after their "insane" paupers. Here is an extract of a cross-questioning of Sir John Miles by Dr. Rose of Brockhall Hospital, chairman of the Select Committee appointed to draw the Parliamentary Inquiry of 1815:

-Dr. Rose: Is any medical attendant particularly directed in your establishment to the cure of insanity?

-Sir Miles: None. Our house is open to all medical gentlemen who care to visit it.

-That is at the expense of the patient?

-It is.

-How many are visited by their medical attendant?

-I cannot tell.

-Do you suppose that there are 20?

-Yes from 20 to 30 probably.

-Is it your opinion, then, that there are above 300 persons in your house who receive no attention or account of particular complaint for which they are confined?

-Certainly.³

2. The Hackney Poor House "Lunatics":

If the Trustees and the Medical Attendant decided that certain poor Parish lunatics did not need to be sent to a local asylum, they would keep them in the Poor House. But this was very rare. As in the following example, most cases were refused:

In a report by a Trust Committee of February 25th, 1835, it is recommended that after an enquiry and an examination, the said "Elizabeth Billings, a pauper passed on to Hackney by the Parish of Hoodford, is an idiot and has been so from her birth and is incapable of entering into a contract of hiring or service ... and that her removal to this parish should be refused." Another report "begs that the orders of removal from the Parish of Shoredith of William Dennis, an attorney supposed to be a lunatic, should be refused... It is recommended that the said William Dennis seeks relief at the local Lunatic Asylum."

The "incarceration" of insane paupers in the Poor House was therefore exceptional. To send the insane to specialised institutions was the "healthiest" and most economical solution. However, some people stayed in Hackney, in an "extra room" in the Infirmary of the Poor House.

As the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 will prove, the paupers who inhabited the Poor House Infirmary's "extra room" before then were, obviously, of a "moderate" nature. But how can we identify these paupers? It is probably the most difficult sector of the population to define, especially when one is confronted with the following report (Minutes of August 5th, 1822):

“It appears that a considerable sum has been spent in the erection of a shed without the approval of the Trustees and that of the 2 single rooms, one of them is occupied by a woman labouring under some mental disease.”

The House classification seemed to incorporate three types of “lunatics”: the elderly relatives, the gentle “idiots” and the aged who can no longer look after themselves.

The room was situated at the far end of the West side behind the laundry and was run according to the Minutes from 1801 until 1820 by a man called Moses Rhodes. This “matron” was regularly paid (a minimum sum of about £70 a year) by the Trustees for his work of caring for the insane in the Poor House grounds. What had originated the building of that room, and who was Moses Rhodes?

There is no indication that the Room for the Insane was built before the building of the Infirmary in 1750. It is therefore fair to presume that the “extra room” was purpose built at the time the sick wards were erected. It is also fair to presume that the reason for this “extension” was purely practical.

We are told in the Minutes that the “Matron”, Moses Rhodes (who, like his successor, Mr. Matthew Davis, who looked after the lunatics until 1850) was part of the local gentry: They both eventually became Trustees.

The Lunacy Act of 1845 will dramatically change this situation. It will generate a system of classification and immediate internment, and will set the foundation stone of the “mental hospitals” of the future.

Monday August 8th

Poor Children of Hackney, 1720-1840:

1. Orphans:

An Act of Parliament of May 5th, 1761, ordered each Parish to keep a regular Register of all Parish infants under the age of 4, "within the bills of mortality". The Hackney Register of Parish Poor Under 4 Years, which starts in 1762, gives the name of children admitted to the Poor House, the date of birth if born in the Poor House or the date of admission if born in the Parish. The name of the mother rarely appears; most of them were orphans. The various volumes of this Register tell us that the Poor House housed an average of 15 abandoned orphans in the eighteenth century, that this number increased to 24 over the first half of the nineteenth century. The majority of cases were girls (the rate here is 1 boy for 6 girls).

Orphans were considered the most endangered category of pauper. They were the least "cost-effective" pauper for a workhouse. For that reason, the law (since the Act of Settlement and Removal of 1662) forced the Trustees, and then later the Guardians, to organise and pay for the emigration of any orphan seeking relief at the workhouse.

Emigration seems to have started around 1810. In the minutes of September 26th of that year, The Master of the Poor House reported "that Maria Adams and her illegitimate child had been passed by an order of Removal from the Parish of Chipping Barnet in the county of Hereford to this Parish". The resolution taken by the Trustees after hearing the report was "that the said order be immediately appealed against".

The process of emigration took on an international dimension in the 1830s when it became a common practice throughout the country to send children to the colonies. In a letter to the Trustees from the Society for the Suppression of Juvenile Vagrancy of November 13th, 1833, the Secretary recommended that children should be sent to British Colonies "for the future comfort and welfare of the children ... and thoroughly recommend Cape Town, a colony most thriving and blessed with a peculiarly temperate and salubrious climate." The Society, after dealing with the applicants, providing them with a passport and a boat ticket, generally kept the Parish informed on how "well" their orphans were in the new world: "The Hackney Pauper named Charles Ball, who had been sent to Canada by your Board with the consent of his father, was placed with Howard & Thompson of Montreal as a store servant and is doing well." (January 27th, 1835)

2. Bastards:

Another problem posed by children were the cases of bastardy, or of illegitimate children. This can be clearly illustrated with an example taken from the Minutes of July 20th 1833, four years before the crowning of Queen Victoria: A special Trust Committee investigated into the "cases of bastardy which has formed so enormous a feature in the Parish expenditure for several years ... The Committee recommends that a more thorough record of cases be conducted". The report states that in the year 1832, 133 cases of bastardy were recorded. But several weeks later, overwhelmed by the nature of the investigation, the Trustees took a discreet resolution: "the cases being so complex, it is recommended that the Master carry on only holding record of such cases in the Register Book"

If emigration was considered too expensive or too harsh for the child; bastards and orphans were either sent to the Army (for boys) or to households requiring cheap servants

(for girls). The aim was, above all, to get rid of starving and unskilled children. But it was also -again- a humane way of saving children from the conditions of the workhouse.

3. Instruction and Apprenticeship:

The Poor House provided a school for those who were not orphans or bastards. The instruction of children took place on site until 1823. An Act of Parliament of “the 2nd and 7th year in the reign of his majesty King George III” ordered the Trusts in charge of the Poor of all Parishes to hold a Register of Parish Poor Children. The various registers available from Hackney provide us with some information on the education and life of these children. The first step in the life of poor children was to receive a good (therefore Christian) education. One of the main duties of the Poor House Trust was to provide children with a teacher and an apprenticeship.

From the age of 5, children were originally educated indoors. But a Report conducted in May 1822 by a Trust Committee indicated clearly the problem: “Mrs Tyer (The Master of the House’s wife) is a very good workwoman, but to be greatly addicted to swearing and drunkenness and to be filthy in her person, but is the only woman in the House qualified for instructing the children.” After the dismissal of the Master, and subsequently of his wife, the education of children took place until the 1840s outside the Poor House. They were sent to an establishment in the Parish of Lambeth where they were educated and looked after. This exile “removed them from the contagion of bad examples, but as affording additional facilities for the cultivation of early habits of industry and subordination, and also for laying the foundations of moral and religious principles at that season of life.”

Apprenticeship began at the age of 10. After instruction, young children were generally sent as placements in a neighbouring factory or household, where they became apprentices. Until the end of the eighteenth century, the average age of apprentices is 13. Here is a list of the most common types of placements offered at Hackney in the last quarter of the eighteenth century: at a fisherman, a baker, a warehouse man, a peruke maker, goldsmith, weaver, silk dyer, shoemaker, bricklayer, white smith, bookbinder, &c. The length of placement was generally 7 years (or “until 21 or marriage”) and until 1834, anyone taking on a placement was requested to pay an average fee of £2. (1763, £4 in 1833)

3. The figures pre-1834:

Overall, the child population (excluding orphans) admitted to the Poor House is a shifting one. From 16 in 1742 to 111 in 1775, to 56 in 1823, &c., children of paupers vary in number. The strict rules around the admittance of vagabond children (Act of Settlement) limited the number of indoor children to only the ones from the Parish or already belonging to an indoor pauper.

At Hackney, unlike other workhouses, and until the 1834 Amendment, children were generally looked after. There are numerous examples in the Minutes of stories of children being protected by the Master or the Matron against villains and evildoers. The Trustees generally looked after their flock: “The child Henry Slayer was unjustifiably and cruelly beaten on July 28th 1831 by Mr Hughes ... it is therefore resolved that Mr. Hughes be fined 20 shillings”.

Thursday August 18th

Life in the Poor House:

Could the life of paupers at the Hackney Poor House have been better than at other more infamous workhouses in the East-End? To answer this question, one must analyse the legends that surround workhouses and the reality that existed at Hackney before the change in the law in 1834.

1. Life in workhouses: the traditional image:

All over the country the various categories of inmates described earlier were always admitted to workhouses in the same manner every morning:

First of all, they entered their name in the Workhouse Registration book, then they were given an average of six ounces of bread and one ounce of cheese. For some workhouses, the vagrants were searched and bathed (except in the cold season) and then allocated to their particular wards. George Orwell gives an endearing account of an admission to a workhouse in his celebrated book *Down and Out in Paris and London*:

“After registering at the office, we were led into the spike by an official known as the Tramp Major (his job is to supervise casuals, and he is generally a workhouse pauper) ... The spike consisted simply of a bathroom and lavatory ... It was a bare, gloomy place of stone and whitewash, unwillingly clean, with a smell which, somehow, I had foreseen from its appearance; a smell of soft soap, Jeyes’ fluid and latrines - a cold, discouraging prisonish smell. ... The scene in the bathroom was extraordinarily repulsive. Fifty dirty, stark-naked men elbowing each other in a room twenty feet square, with only two bath-tubs and two slimy roller towels between them all. I shall never forget the reek of dirty feet. Less than half the tramps actually bathed, but they all washed their faces and feet, and the horrid greasy little clouts known as toe-rags which they bind round their toes. Fresh water was only allowed for men who were having a complete bath, so many men had to bathe in water where others had washed their feet. The porter shoved us to and fro, giving the rough side of his tongue when anyone wasted time. When my turn came for the bath, I asked if I might swill out the tub, which was streaked with dirt, before using it. He answered simply, ‘Shut yer f- mouth and get on with yer bath!’. That set the social tone of the place, and I did not speak again.” 4

After the common bath, the new inmate was taken to the wards or cell. Margaret Harkness gave in this instance a precise account of the first visit of a casual in one of these wards: “He was then taken into a cell measured 8 feet by 4 feet, at the end of which was a small dark hole called the stone pit. The cell was lighted by a jet of gas, and the first thing he saw there was an inscription, written in uncouth letters on the white-washed walls opposite the entrance: ‘I’ve served my Queen and my country for 15 years, and this is what I’ve come to.”5

After this first admission, which was common to all workhouses, life in such an environment was limited to work and what was available. There were few books or other amusements and card games were strictly forbidden. The food was usually adequate but unappetising and often cold after being carried long distances from the kitchens. The inmates’ diet did not change from one century to another; they mainly ate mutton, bread and beer, but never vegetables or fruit, until an official diet was imposed on all workhouses from April 1st, 1888: “Breakfast: 5 ounces bread, 1/2 ounces butter, 1/2 pint of tea. Dinner: 4 ounces cooked meat, 8 ounces potatoes, 2 ounces bread. Supper: 5 ounces bread, 1/2 ounces butter, 1 pint of gruel or meat broth”. 6

2. Life at Hackney Poor House:

Many other accounts of the admission procedure and of the life in workhouses have given vivid pictures of how the nineteenth century dealt with poverty. In Hackney, the most precise account of the daily life of the Poor House is given by the old rules and orders provided by the Overseers of the Poor and drawn up as early as 1750:

“Rules and Orders to be observed by every person belonging to the Work-House of the Parish of St. John, at Hackney, in the County of Middlesex:

“1. To pray every morning, every evening, and to say Grace before each meal and Thanks after each meal... Those who do not attend lose their next dinner.

“2. To go every Sunday to Church. Those found loitering or begging by the way to lose their next meal.

“3. To not bring into the House distilled Liquors. Those disturbing the House by brawling, quarrelling, fighting or abusive language shall lose one Day's meal.

“4. To be kept to labour from six of the clock in the morning to six at night. Those who refuse, to be kept in bread and water or expelled from the House. “7

These rules confirm the information found later on, in the Minutes. Here is one which relates to the 1750 “Rules and Orders”:

In a resolution following a Committee Report of September 3rd, 1822, “it is decided [amongst other things] that the gates should be locked between 9pm every night in summer and 8pm in winter, that Sunday is a day of rest and worship, that the wards should be cleaned once a week, that the inmates perform morning and evening prayers, that the leave-day should be Wednesday for men and Thursday for women, that the bread allowances should not exceed 1/4 ounces, that not more than a pint of beer should be consumed during meals”, &c.

Life at Hackney Poor House, like at any other workhouse, was as regulated as clockwork. The main occupation of the inmates was work. From the eighteenth century, there were two types of work at Hackney: The breaking of granite or the various works of the Manufacture. These two types were exclusively selected so as not to clash or compete with the various activities of the neighbourhood.

The breaking of Blue Guernsey Granite was a “speciality” of Hackney Poor House. The stone yard, the shed housing the stone and the tools to break it were situated on the left-hand side of the Poor House, behind the men’s ward. Every month there was a delivery of large blocks of granite (as much as 500 tons in the 1830s and up to 1,000 tons in the 1840s) and a collection of finely broken down blocks and sacks of gravel destined for construction (as much as 20,000 bushels of broken stone in one year in the 1840s). The method of transport of the Granite was by boat, over the Regent’s Canal basin. The various deals with the quarry providing the stone for breaking occupy a lot of space in the Minutes all through the two centuries. The granite was bought and sold per ton (12 shillings and 3 pence per ton unbroken against 12 shillings and 6 pence per ton broken up - circa 1830), creating a cost/price balance that only a workhouse could have afforded.

The Hackney Poor House Manufacture was a fully equipped factory established in the eighteenth century. In 1834 it employed 76 inmates and 18 boys. The main occupation for

men was the breaking of flax and for boys the breaking of wool. The task for women was to thread and weave the flax or the cotton. The Master of the Manufacture was a very busy and very respected man who had to administer the factory, buy the raw materials, provide the linen for the Poor House, sell the remainder to shops on the High Street and keep very strict accounts of his activities. But his duties also included the training of young children. A report written by The Master of the Manufacture and transcribed in the Minutes of December 24th, 1835, tells us that in 18 years (at a salary of £78 per annum) he trained 379 children in the profession of breaking and spinning flax and cotton.

Besides work, there was very little at Hackney for inmates to do. The main objective of the Trustees was to keep them as busy and productive as possible. Any breach of the rules was severely punished.

3. The System of Punishment at Hackney Poor House:

Judging by the descriptions of the 24 cells at the Poor House and by the complaints of the Master, often comparing his duties with those of colleagues from other workhouses, it seems that Hackney was a rather severe workhouse:

In an inquiry into the persons "who are generally the most obnoxious to good order and decent behaviour", the Trustees complained that "it is from the females (apparently healthy young persons) that offences principally proceed, by violent and vicious behaviour, ... and that good order can be effected by removing and thereby reforming the offenders. [We] are of opinion that the females with bastard children should be subject to wear the dress [i.e. a special uniform], according to law". (July 23rd, 1819) Another example of tough punishment in Hackney is given in a letter written by Trustee Sean Leblanc and inscribed in the Minutes on August 22nd, 1819, in which he asks the other Trustees to revise the 48 hours of confinement for offences and lower it to 36 hours, as at Bethnal Green.

Overall, it is difficult to quantify the severity of the crime with the apportionment of the punishment. An earlier example shows the difficulty Trustees had in punishing the inmates: "Mr. Gill be confined in the Close Room for one week for accusing Mr. Taylor of having starved the poor and that he be fed on bread and water only during that time ... Mrs. Gill behave very abusive to Mr. Taylor on her husband being taken into confinement ... and she was called in and reprimanded and told if she ever came into the House again and was guilty of the like behaviour, she would receive the same punishment. Resolved that Gill and family being discharged, having applied for that purpose and that if they come into the House again, with their family, their eldest boy be sent to the Manufacture without the knowledge of his parents." (January 19th, 1793)

The one-week confinement was (and will be until the end in 1929) the main type of punishment. It is interesting to compare the consequences of Mr. Gill's bad language with the activities of Mr. Woodhouse, who was "confined in the Close Room for 6 days for confining himself in a room with Sarah Townley one of the girls in the House, when he should have been at prayers." (February 2nd, 1794)

So can we, at this stage, ask if these tough punishments show that the life at Hackney Poor House until the mid-nineteenth century was worse than at other workhouses in the East End? What is certain is that the life of paupers who were forced to enter the workhouse was not an easy one: A Report in the Minutes Book of March 1826, relates the story of James Sayer, his wife and 6 children: [They] "entered the House on November 9th 1825 and remained there until February 1826, when Mr. James Sayer found work while on an errand." The said Sayer knew that as soon as he found work, he had to take his wife and

children with him, but failed to do so. So the Trustees recommended that “he should not be permitted to visit his wife and children in the House [where he had abandoned them] or to hold any communication with them.”

4. Other Rules at the Poor House:

Because of their limited number, the inmates at Hackney Poor House were perceived all through the eighteenth century and until the mid-nineteenth century as a big family. It was like a small community of deviants, the unfortunates of a once wealthy Parish. And as in any community, a series of small rules is the most important thing in everyday life. Some examples of these small rules provide us with several possible narratives of the life at Hackney Poor House, and of Hackney paupers in general:

On August 24th, 1793, the Minutes report that the Trustees have ordered that “females in the House wear only such caps as the Master of the Poor House provides for the House and that no other pattern of caps be permitted to be worn.”

On December 12th, 1794, the Trustees ordered that any wedding happening between two inmates of the Poor House “be granted a special relief of 2 guineas.”

On October 27th, 1799, a complaint is being made against Matthew Wilson because “he will not suffer any person to lay in the bed with him, contrary to the order and direction of the Master and Mistress of the Poor’s House, who being present was told that room was wanted, so he must consent to it, but he absolutely denied it.”

On June 22nd, 1829, the Trustees ordered that “a day of non-attendance” at the Poor House be punished by a fine of 2 shillings per day.”

These various examples show the various concerns of the Trustees, but also what preoccupations filled the life of inmates.

5. Diet at Hackney:

The diet described earlier when surveying the general image of workhouses corresponds perfectly to what the various Minutes report over 200 years. The meals were almost identical every day and did not change over the two centuries: Breakfast: either bread and gruel or porridge; dinner: either cooked meat and potatoes or soup and suet pudding; supper: bread and cheese or bread and broth. (As reported on February 20th, 1837) For inmates over 60, there was tea, bread and butter instead of gruel or porridge for breakfast. Women saw their rations cut by a quarter compared with men. The Poor House tea was made every day in the following manner: 1 gallon of boiling water, 1 ounce of dried tea, 5 ounces of sugar and 3/4 pint of milk.

Only in exceptional occasions was there a change in diet, as this example proves: “The coronation of the Queen [Victoria] brought the Guardians to allow a special meal to be given to the inmates on such occasion: a dinner of roast beef, plum pudding and beer.” The only extravagance here is not the beer, which was allowed to all the inmates (an average of 1 pint per meal), but the roast beef, which was rare and expensive.

PART 2:

**HACKNEY UNION WORKHOUSE
1838-1967**

- 1. The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act**
- 2. Hackney's Response to the 1834 Poor Law Act**
- 3. The Building of the Union Workhouse**
- 4. The New Administration**
- 5. The Parish Trustees, their life and duties after 1834**
- 6. The Battle for the Outdoor Relief**
- 7. Health Care in Hackney after 1834**
- 8. The Workhouse Population 1837-1867**
- 9. Children of the Union**

Monday August 29th

The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act:

1. The Revision of the Tudor Poor Law:

By 1834 there was mounting disquiet over the way in which the cost of Poor Law rates had risen during the wars against France, had dropped and again risen by 1831. The see-saw game of depression and growth prompted Members of Parliament to feel that the Tudor Poor Law should be reformed.

It seemed clear that something had gone wrong with the old Poor Law System and with its timid subsequent modifications. The economist Rev. Thomas Malthus was the first one to argue that "any great interference with the affairs of other people is a species of tyranny." Other objections came from David Ricardo who believed that only a certain percentage of national wealth was available for wages and that the more that was spent from national resources on poor relief, the less was available for wages. Despite these objections, the system of workhouses was to be reinforced.

In February 1832, a Royal Commission on the Poor Laws was appointed. Its aim was to discover how the old Tudor Poor Law was administered throughout the 15,000 parishes of England and Wales. The commissioners' Report attacked the old system of allowances and promptly recommended a reform in which the workhouse became not a house to shelter and relieve the poor, but a deterrent to poverty. The main idea was that the person relieved must not be made more comfortable than the worst paid labourer in work, and all relief outside workhouses was declared unlawful. There is no doubt that, although it became a manifesto for governments of the time, the Report ignored the economic causes of such widespread poverty and that it put all the blame on the "endlessly over-indulgent individual".

2. The Amendment:

The Report was published in early 1834 and the Poor Law Amendment Act was promptly passed a few months later. The Act required the appointment of three Poor Law Commissioners and of local Poor Law Authorities (The Guardians of the Poor). For efficiency and control, the Act forced the parishes to work together on the task of relieving the poor, creating 350 artificial unions, amongst them the Parishes of Stoke Newington and Hackney.

The Act was a triumph for the new ideologically centralised, utilitarian middle class rate payers. The new Poor Law allowed them to control the relief of poverty and to force the paupers to practise self-help.

The planning of new workhouses followed the traditional ideology of public buildings of the time: "Conceive a spacious building resembling the palace of a peer, airy, and elevated, and elegant, surrounded by extensive and swelling grounds and gardens. The interior is fitted up with galleries, and workshops. The sun and the air are allowed to enter at every window, the view of the shrubberies and fields, and groups of labourers, is unobstructed by shutters or bars; all is clean, quiet and attractive. The inmates all seem to be actuated by the common impulse of enjoyment, all are busy, and delighted by being so." W.A.F.

Browne: "What asylums were, are and ought to be", 1837:229 8

Saturday September 3rd

Hackney's Response to the amendment:

1. The Trustees' final responsibilities towards local paupers:

The first notification of the possible change in the law regarding the relief of paupers appeared in the Minutes on October 21st, 1833. The various investigations set out by Parliament prompted a local debate amongst the gentry of Hackney. The main area of discussion was how to manage the workhouse and the "about-to-be-banned" outdoor relief system better. The democratic system in place implied that after several meetings, the Trustees decided on November 13th, 1833, to print 500 small posters relating their opinions on the matter of the management of the workhouse and fly-post them all around Hackney. There is no mention in the Minutes of any private response to this fly-posting.

Its outcome appears four months later, in May 1834: "A committee is appointed by the Board of Trustees of the Poor to watch the progress of the Poor Law Amendment bill and to oppose any clause therein that they may think prejudicial." (May 27th)

No opposition came from Hackney. The clerk conscientiously rewrote the various articles of the proposed bill in the Minutes and took note of the various comments of the Trustees. The only points of contention seem to have been over the idea that owners of tenements under £10 a year rent were made liable for the Poor Rate and over details regarding the applications of mothers with illegitimate children.

Overall there was no strong disagreement over the amendment. It was only later, when the Act was finally put into practice, that the Hackney Trustees of the Poor reacted. For example, the Trustees wrote a letter to the newly appointed Commissioners on January 23rd, 1835, requesting some clarification over the mode of election of Trustees. At another time, the Trustees requested a more precise analysis of the relationship between Trustees and Guardians.

2. From Trustees to Guardians:

The establishment of the Union with its Board of Guardians was another problem altogether. The Trustees accepted in good faith the marriage of their Parish with Stoke Newington, which officially took place on January 9th, 1837. They also accepted without any comment the establishment of a common relief rate of 1 shilling and 4 pence per pauper per week, which was lower than the one offered at Hackney. The only concern came over the actual transition date. They requested from Parliament a delay before passing on the responsibility of the Poor to the Guardians so as to levy the Rate on time.

Besides these minor details, the Parish of Hackney seems to have accepted the Amendment with stern optimism. After all, a new Board was taking responsibility for its poor, a new workhouse was planned, a more responsible future lay ahead.

Friday September 9th

The building of the Union Workhouse (Infirmary excluded):

1. The Social and Economic local Context:

Before any attempt to understand the reasons for the erection of a new Workhouse, it is important to clearly articulate the social context in Hackney. As for many other parishes, the nineteenth century was for Hackney the century of expansion.

Most of Hackney was built in the second half of the nineteenth century. If one analyses the various figures laid down by the Parish Trustees in their Minutes regarding the total rateable value of buildings in Hackney (on which the Poor Rate was based), the following increase appears:

1800 :	£40,000
1834:	£75,000
1862:	£165,000
1882:	£819,000
1900:	£1,234,000
1930:	£1,945,000

This expansion obviously was also accompanied by an increase in population: Although the land area covered by Hackney did not dramatically change over the centuries (more or less 2,000 acres), the Hackney population on the other hand rose as follows:

1801:	14,192
1831:	34,527
1861:	83,295
1891:	186,462
1901:	204,342
1931:	297,128

Thanks to the increase in the number of rate payers, the Parish contribution to its paupers never failed to materialise. The Trustees paid the Guardians a contribution to poverty every quarter. This increased as follows:

1827:	£6,200
1834:	£12,430
1852:	£19,930
1877:	£29,740
1882:	£42,540
1885:	£50,230
1890:	£62,150
1900:	£99,200

It is remarkable that there were never any complaints from the rate payers about the various extensions, refurbishments, or building works carried out by the Guardians, which were costly and for obvious reasons quite controversial. (The only one took place around the construction of C Block, in 1909, at a time when the administration of poor relief was critically put into question, and the threat of a change in the law was imminent.)

2. Expansion of the Workhouse:

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 established the union of Hackney and Stoke Newington. This change in the law and the increase of paupers seeking relief prompted the two Parishes to plan new buildings to house the paupers from both parishes.

This task was administered by The Guardians, the new “local Authority” imposed by the 1834 Act. The Guardians served as a link between the centralised Commissioners (based in Somerset House in London) and the Master of the Workhouse. They replaced the Trustees in the day-to-day running of the workhouse. The Trustees were left with the task of making sure that their paupers were properly treated in the Union Workhouse and, above all, with the task of levying the Parish Poor Rate.

The Stoke Newington and Hackney “Guardians of the Poor” did not pull down the entire old eighteenth century Workhouse in 1836 and then rebuild it. The process of enlarging the workhouse and Infirmary spreads over the entire nineteenth century.

The first step was to replace the eighteenth century front block of the workhouse. This block was situated on Homerton High Street where the Infirmary Administration block now stands. The new building, after the remains of the old building were sold, was erected in 1841. This new U shaped building, which was to be pulled down some 70 years later, took exactly the same proportions as its predecessor. It housed, on the ground floor, the Committee Room, a lobby, the kitchen with its larder and pantry and the Master’s store room. On the first floor was the Master’s bedroom with its dressing and dining rooms and two storage areas. The top floor housed the servants’ quarters, the bottle store room and the bread room. On either side of the inner courtyard stood the men’s and women’s respective dining rooms and sleeping areas, and 6 small cottages which included the potato cellar, the coal and lime sheds, the pig sties, the dye house, the flax shop, the carpenter’s shop, the weaving room, the school rooms, the dead house, the garden and tool sheds. As in the old workhouse, the Infirmary stood behind the women’s quarters. It housed the nursery, two infirm wards, an “extra ward”, a mother’s ward, a laundry and drying room, a chapel, a lodging and a needle room.

-F, G&H, and other Blocks

This main core of buildings was supplemented over the years by new houses on the south side. There seems to have been a general consensus to expand in that direction, with the old laundry, the chapel, and what are now called “G&H Block”, E Block and F Block.

The reasons for calling one building “G&H Block” was that the Local Government Board recommended, just before its erection in 1881, that “instead of having very large wards and a staircase at either end, the building should be divided by 2 supplementary staircases. By this the number of inmates in each ward would become much more manageable”. G&H Blocks were respectively for able-bodied men and bed-ridden elderly men. F Block was a female “pavilion”.

A lot of other buildings were erected and pulled down all through the nineteenth century. Here is a non-exhaustive list of the buildings which have now disappeared: The old Porter’s Lodge, The Stables, The Cells with above them The Master’s House, The Bake House, The old Stone Yard, The Tea Room, The Wood Store, The old Carpenter’s Shop, The old Workshop Unit, The Manufacture, The Counting House, The old Nurse’s Room, The old Lunatic Ward, The old Mental Block and several latrines and privies.

-Outdoor Expansion:

The Hackney Workhouse was not confined only to Homerton. During the overcrowded years and until the end, the Guardians expanded in various directions. The most important expansion were the building in Essex of schools in Chipping Ongar, of an extra workhouse in Brentwood and, in London, of Labour and Casual Wards on Gainsborough Road (now East Way).

Situated on the road to Colchester, the “Brentwood Branch Workhouse”, as it was called, housed able-bodied men and children. Built in the 1890s, the site offered accommodation for 340 adults and 107 children. It also provided a 20-bed Infirm Ward. There is very little information or records on this “branch”, it seems that the Branch was in fact a farm whose crops and products were separately regulated by the Agricultural Act of 1896. It traded, amongst other things, in cows, horses and pigs. The fields were used for hay making. During and after World War I, the “Branch Workhouse” also housed “sane female epileptics”.

Chipping Ongar’s schools were on the same road. It appears in the Minutes that the Guardians first took over the provincial school, and then bought it and rebuilt it. It ended up boarding an average of 1,000 children.

Closer to Homerton were the “Gainsborough Road” Wards, situated on the slope towards Hackney Marsh. Nothing remains of these buildings, very little information and no photographic records. Even the site has been erased by the M11 extension. The only reliable source comes from the Minutes, where it appears that these wards were for the temporary shelter of non-settled poor. They were passed on to the Metropolitan Asylums Board for administration on March 28th, 1912.

c. Improvements:

Not unlike the various additions to the workhouse, improvements were staggered through the century. One of the most important was the installing of gas light and later of electricity. Here is an extract of a letter from the Electric Light and Power Co. Ltd of Battersea Foundry of October 20th, 1890, which summarises a step to progress undertaken by the Guardians. The letter states that “in February of the present year, the Guardians permitted to tender for the lighting of the Union by electricity from a dynamo to be fixed on the premises ... but a more advantageous scheme would be to light the premises from a site in Hackney Wick on which to erect a central station for the supply of electricity to factories and other large consumers.”

d. The Architect:

The main architect who was commissioned to plan most of the workhouse’s changes (excluding the Infirmary blocks) was Mr. Arthur Ashpitel. In a letter of November 15th, 1845, referring to the planned Boiler House attached to the Chapel and to an extension to the Board’s Room, he proposed “that everything shall be done in the most substantial, but plain manner, consistent with the purposes for which the building is intended.” Everything indeed was done to that prescription, except perhaps the new steam apparatus: “It appears that some communication has been made with the drains of the water closets at the back of the building and that as soon as the pipes of the drying room become hot, a smell of the most powerful and disgusting kind fills the whole basement storey”. (February 28th, 1846)

All the changes that occurred throughout the nineteenth Century were ratified by the Poor Law Commissioners or Board and later by the Local Government Board. The sums borrowed, the application to the Exchequer’s Bill Loan Board, the application to lending bodies (which incidentally with the expansion of the Infirmary ended up involving colossal

amounts borrowed from the Atlas Assurance Society, the Liverpool Victoria Legal Society, the Metropolitan Board of Works, the Public Works, and much later the London County Council), the repayments and various instalment arrangements over these loans, the contract with the Architect, the relationship with the contractors – everything had to receive the seal of approval from the central authorities.

2. Capacity Accommodation:

An important element here needs elucidation. Figures relating to East End workhouses always mount in thousands. Tales reporting overcrowded wards with often as many as four paupers per bed were not true for Hackney. The workhouse only provided a set number of beds; it could not –for obvious financial and social reasons– admit more than its capacity provided for. It is true that the Guardians of the Union looked after thousands of paupers, but these were spread amongst the various institutions in their charge –children’s homes and schools, alms houses, lunatic asylums, &c.

On October 2nd, 1850, the Guardians expressed their pride in providing spacious accommodation for all the poor. The House could shelter 655 persons and could receive up to 580 outdoor paupers. This means that when the house was full, more than 1,200 people thrived behind its walls. But this, at least until the end of the century, was rarely the case. On a summer day of 1850 there were only 337 indoor inmates, but this excluded the sick paupers confined in the Infirmary.

The new Union Workhouse accommodations were as follow: 156 men’s beds, 23 infirm men’s beds, 68 women’s double beds, 7 women’s single beds, 38 infirm women’s beds, 4 single and 3 double beds for idiots, 7 double beds for couples, 24 double beds for boys, 44 double beds for girls, and 10 double beds for infants.

The old Infirmary accommodation provided 22 sick men’s beds, 19 sick women’s beds, 10 single beds for the “lying in”, 20 mothers’ single beds, 10 single beds for boys and girls and 12 beds for nurses.

Thursday September 22nd

The New Administration:

As soon as the Poor Law Amendment Act was passed in 1834, the newly appointed Commissioners for England and Wales required that each parish should constitute a board of guardians. This board was composed of local gentry in charge of “social affairs” in Hackney and in Stoke Newington.

It took three years for both Parishes to constitute their first Board. After several debates and uncertainties over the nature of the relationship between the two parishes (the extent of Stoke Newington’s involvement for example, which was fixed at a ratio of 1/10), the very first meeting of the newly appointed Guardians (most of them also Parish Trustees) took place on Monday January 30th, 1837, at 9.30 in the forenoon.

1. The Poor Law Commissioners and their successors, the Poor Law Board:

In the new hierarchy, the Commissioners represented the key decision-makers in the administration of Poor Relief in every Parish. Although it may seem strange now that every detail of the daily life of a local workhouse should be checked by unknown strangers from the Central Office, at the time there was no other alternative. The three Commissioners appointed to run the huge organisation of Poor Relief in Britain were based in Somerset House, in London. They had a secretary and 26 assistants to run every aspect of the 350 newly created united parishes.

The pressures from the Anti-Poor Law Movement (most of which came from the north of England during the mid-1840s) forced the Commissioners to resign in 1847. They were replaced by the Poor Law Board, which this time included members of the Government. The new Board ran the Poor Law Institutions until 1871, when it was replaced by the Local Government Board, a less centralised administration also in charge of public health. The Local Government Board was dismantled in 1919 and the Ministry of Health was created.

2. The Guardians:

The Guardians were constituted under the new Law as representatives of each Parish of the Union. To be more precise, each Guardian represented a “ward” within his Parish. For the purpose of electing the first board of Guardians, the Hackney Union was divided into 6 wards: Hackney church provided 3 Guardians, Stamford Hill 2, West Hackney 3, South Hackney 3, Dalston 1 and Homerton 1. These wards and their respective number of Guardians will increase in number over the years, the wards, being further divided, requiring more Guardians, and so on —from the 13 original to 29 in April 1859, to more than 56 in 1897. The election of Guardians was strictly monitored by the Commissioners. Each applicant had to own a property in the Parish. Most of them were classified under the category “quality and calling” as “gentleman or esquire”. At Hackney in the 1840s, there was one attorney, one plumber, one manufacturer, one physician, one wine merchant, one coal merchant and several “gentlemen”.

The Guardians did not replace the Trustees, they just took over some of their responsibilities. These were ratified by the General Consolidate Order of June 24th, 1847, and mainly covered the running of the following institutions: The Workhouse, The Infirmary, Chipping Ongar Children’s House, Brentwood School, Hackney Training School for Nurses, Sydney Road (now Kenworthy Road) Children’s Homes, Dalston Dispensary, Thomas Wyles Charity, Dalston Relief Office, all the local Medical Attendants and the well-being of parish paupers in lunatic asylums. All these various duties were conscientiously

reported to the Commissioners, Board and later the Local Government Board on a regular basis. The commissioners controlled every activity of the Board, from the admission of “foreign” cases to the form of election of the Board.

Not unlike the previous system, the Guardians divided themselves in Committees and Sub-Committees to perform their duties. The number of these committees will increase over the years, but the most important ones were: House and Visiting Committee, Stone Yard Committee, Infirmary Visiting Committee, Building Committee, Emigration Committee, District Visiting Committees (for outdoor relief), School Committee, Brentwood Branch Committee with its Farm Sub-Committee, Gainsborough Road Committee, Audit and Finance Committee, Union Assessment Committee, Settlement and Lunacy Committee, Store and Stock Committee, the Joint Committee for the Management of the Old Town Hall, &c.

These committees closely linked the Guardians to the actual inmates – much more so than the Trustees, their predecessors. They had a board meeting room on site and often had lunch at the Workhouse.

The Audit and Finance Committee had the heavy responsibility every quarter to claim the Parishes’ contributions towards the running of the Union. This contribution represented in the first year £10,000 for Hackney and £2,430 for Stoke Newington. The vast difference between the two parishes is understandable if one considers the numbers of paupers from each parish: for the same year, 377 from Hackney and only 23 from Stoke Newington.

This system implied a perfect relationship between Trustees, who provided the money, and Guardians, who relieved the poor. Although it did not occur at Hackney, the system was enforced so as to avoid possible conflicts. In 1871, the Guardians, in the eventuality of the non-performance of the Trustees’ duties, reorganised their financial bodies by creating the Metropolitan Common Fund, which paid for the maintenance of poor children, and the Metropolitan Asylum Fund, which paid for the maintenance of sick paupers.

These Funds were in fact set up by the 1871 Poor Law Amendment Act, which amalgamated the Poor Law and the Public Health Board into the Local Government Board. This new set-up, which implied a different and separate organisation of the Management of the Infirmary, is analysed in the chapter “Towards Hackney Hospital”.

Overall, the duties of the Guardians did not change throughout the century. They performed their role with a solemn if not boring attitude, obeying the orders of the central authorities with a passive resignation.

3. The Administrative Body:

The administration of the workhouse was greatly expanded after the change in the law.

a. Employees:

In 1888 when the workhouse accommodated more than 800 inmates, there were roughly 150 employees and an average of 30 temps:

-Administration of Outdoor Relief: 9 Outdoor Relief Officers, 2 Outdoor Relief Attendants, 1 Outdoor Relief Office Cleaner, 9 Outdoor Medical Attendants, 2 Outdoor Dispensers of Medicine, and 1 Assistant.

-Administration of the Workhouse: 1 Clerk, 2 Clerk Assistants, 1 Master, 1 Matron and her helper, 3 Labour Superintendents, 12 Nurses, 15 Wash women or Scrubbers, 1 Cook, 1 Kitchen Assistant, 1 Scullery Woman, 1 Bread Woman, 1 House Servant, 1 Bed man, 2 Bricklayers, 1 Chaplain, 1 Relief Overseer, 2 Labour Superintendent, 1 Labour Yard Porter, 2 Casual Ward Keeper, 2 Messengers, 2 Gate Keepers, 1 Night Porter, 2 Painters, 1 Coachman, 1 Hairdresser, 1 Organist, 1 Stocker, 1 Gardener, 1 Watchman, 2 Laundry Superintendents and their assistant, 7 Laundry Women and a Fireman.

-Administration of the Infirmary: 1 Resident Medical Attendant and his servant, 1 Medical Officer, 1 Steward and his servant, 1 Steward's Clerk, 1 Chaplain, 1 Superintendent Day Nurse, 1 Superintendent Night Nurse, 28 Nurses, 1 Infant Nurse and her helper, 1 Nursery Attendant, 4 Lunatic Attendants, 2 Ward men, 1 Cook, 1 Infirmary Engineer, 1 Infirmary Hairdresser, 1 Ironer.

-Administration of the School: 2 Schoolmasters, 1 School mistress and her helper, 1 Infant School Mistress, 1 Shoe Master, 1 Master Tailor, 1 Sewing Mistress, 1 School Chaplain, 1 School Medical Attendant, 1 Matron, 1 Cook and 1 Store Keeper and Clerk.

This list, which does not include the staff in charge of areas such as vaccination, will be greatly expanded with the addition of the four blocks at the Infirmary and the creation of a separate management, bringing in professionals like surgeons, theatre sisters, radiologists, anaesthetist, electrical masseuses (sic), dentists, &c., raising the number of employees to an average of 250.

b. The Clerk:

The Clerk occupied under the new system a key position in the administrative system of the workhouse. The particularity in Hackney was that he fulfilled the same position for the Guardians and for the Trustees. His duties are clearly outlined in the Trustees' Minutes of March 24th, 1846: The following activities are to be performed for both organisations: "Summon and attend all Committee Meetings, prepare 2 sets of Poor Rates, write all summons against defaulters, prepare the accounts, attend all appeal meetings, represent the Guardians in Court, prepare all notices, establish the list of voters and claimants, examine and ascertain the settlement of all poor persons applying for relief."

While before 1834 this key role in the administration of the workhouse was held by the Trustees and the Master, after 1834 it was to become one of the most powerful positions in the workhouse system.

4. Complexity of the Union tasks:

There seems to have been great confusion over the various changes in the Poor Law. Two examples illustrate this:

Regarding the relationship between the two parishes: After endless discussions between the Guardians of both parishes over the repartition of the workhouse's effects, "The commissioners desire to state with reference to the Workhouse effects which have been valued at £1,572, that the Parish of Stoke Newington will have to pay the Parish of Hackney the sum of £122 as its proportion of the amount." (June 20th, 1837)

Regarding the abolition of the Out-Door Relief for all: A letter from the Guardians asking for reassurance over the fact that the relief of paupers residing out of the Union is possible, "because the Board is at a loss to know in what way relief of this nature can be

administered so as to prevent imposition and great expense and inconvenience and requesting an early reply as the case requires immediate attention.”

These two examples show the level of control of the Commissioners and the confusion created by the new system.

5. Other Charitable Organisations within the Union:

Besides official poor relief, the Union and its dreaded workhouse, the local community provided paupers with an alternative. All through the nineteenth century there was a flourishing market of charitable institutions, some of which received the approval and even the support of the Union.

Amongst the charities which collaborated with the Union in relieving the poor in Hackney, it is important to highlight the role played by the Thomas Wyle Charity, which was set up through a will in favour of the Guardians and which aimed at providing an annual income for 10 childless widows above 60 years of age and resident in Hackney. This charity, which was run by the Union, will subsist until the abolition of the Poor Laws.

Another institution worth mentioning is the Salvation Army, which maintained men chargeable to the Union in a “farm colony” at Hadleigh.

Other charities include the East-London Apprenticing Fund, the National Association for Promoting the Welfare of the Feeble-Minded, the National Society for the prevention of cruelty to children, the Brabazon Employment Society, the Clapton Home for Girls of Feeble-Mind, &c.

Alongside these formal organisations, there were also many charitable persons providing occasional charity in kind. The most common gifts were old newspapers, books and flowers. “On June 22nd, 1915, a lady who desires to remain anonymous gave strawberries and sugar to the aged female inmates of the House. This lady has for some years past given the old ladies this annual treat.” (July 6th, 1915)

Tuesday September 26th

The Parish Trustees, their life and duties after 1834:

1. A Restructured Board of Trustees:

The composition of the Board of Trustees changed as soon as the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act was passed. The system had to compete with the other parishes in the Union and Hackney had to provide the majority of the income for the Union.

a. Division of labour:

Like the Union, Hackney Parish itself was divided into “wards”, each providing a set number of Trustees. There was Hackney “Central”, West Hackney, South Hackney, Stamford Hill, Dalston, Homerton and De Beauvoir. Each of these wards provided one or two Trustees and one or two Rate Collectors. In 1837 there were 13 Trustees and 8 collectors and in 1858, 25 Trustees and 17 Collectors.

These Trustees represented the rate-payers of Hackney. In 1856 there were, for a population of 41,000 people, 250 Rate-payers in West Hackney, 388 in South Hackney and 800 in Hackney Central, which at the time included De Beauvoir and Dalston. Thus the Rates were levied on 1,438 land or property owners in Hackney in the mid-nineteenth century.

Not unlike the Guardians, the Trustees were divided into Committees and sub-Committees. Amongst the most important ones were: the Finance Committee, the Warrant Committee, the Survey and Assessment Committee, the Fire Engine Committee with 40 people, &c.

b. The Various Rates levied by the Trustees:

The Trustees, with the help of the Collectors who called in at every rate-paying house every year, levied the following rates: General Rates, Poor Rates, Police Rates, Lighting Rates, Sewer and Consolidate Rate, and later Board of Works Rate, &c. The Church Rates were abolished by order of the Poor Law Board and by the mid-century Parochial Assessment Act.

These rates were proportional to the value of the property. This meant that for every pound of property value, the Trustees would levy 1 shilling towards the Rates. This implied a constant reassessment of the various properties in the Parish and of their value. The total parish property value was an important factor in determining how much money was available to the Guardians. Every half year, either at Lady Day or at Michaelmas, the Parish would establish the total figure representing the rateable value of all the properties in Hackney. This figure increased tremendously every time the Parish accepted the provision of new terraces, new streets and new buildings. Overall, the rateable value of Hackney alone (this excludes Stoke Newington) increased from £140,000 in 1837 to £950,000 in 1890. This increase naturally corresponds with the expansion of Hackney and will carry on increasing with the addition of compound houses, rented houses, &c. It will be less significant after the change in the Law required parishes to establish their Poor Rate not on the property value, but on the number of paupers.

But before this change, the system implied that the Trustees kept a vigilant eye on all new properties or developments in their Parish. The number of surveys all through the second half of the nineteenth century is incalculable, and their sophisticated thoroughness included every detail of the house and owner.

2. New duties for the Trustees:

The system in place also forced the Trustees to clearly mark out what and who belonged to the Parish. This implied the new task of delimiting the geographical boundaries of Hackney so as to force all the land owners to pay their rate and to provide relief only to the poor residing in its districts. These boundaries were set amongst others at Cock Castle Lane, Kingsland Green, Union Row, the Ditch (of Shoreditch), Brickfields, Jolly's Farm, &c.

Besides the obvious improvements to Hackney and the subsidising of the Union Workhouse, another task for the Trustees was to assist the various charities established in the Parish financially. They held bonds which were deposited in an Iron Safe at the Parish House, they financed and looked after the fire engines, they paid the Police their share of the Rate, &c.

Levying the rate and paying the Guardians were the major tasks of the Trustees. It occupied most of their time and ultimately enforced the Poor Law system. It is they who will later occupy the Town Hall and become Hackney Council.

Sunday September 2nd

The battle for outdoor relief:

Established since Elizabethan times, outdoor relief was virtually abolished by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. As we have already seen, the Act did not abolish all the various forms of outdoor relief. What was abolished was the relief in money to paupers not belonging to the relieving Parish. In other words, all relief to non-residents, which oddly included parish mothers with illegitimate children, ceased in 1837. This implied a more severe control of who received money and who didn't. It also implied a better use of the workhouse.

The other form of relief abolished was the outdoor pittance, i.e. the allocation of bread to paupers during harsh winter days. This was replaced, in typical capitalist fashion, by work at the stone yard. The work was rewarded in the 1830s with a pittance of 1 or 2 shillings, some bread and some gruel.

1. The Parish Pension Scheme:

a. The Pensioners:

What was accepted was the payment of relief to local paupers, generally elderly invalids (pensioners). The number of pensioners in Hackney was 480 in 1834, the number of outdoor paupers in Stoke Newington was 25. This redefinition of the pension scheme forbade outdoor relief to local vagrants and therefore created the effect wanted by the Poor Law Commissioners: a drastic drop in "unnecessary expenses". Unfortunately, the rise in outdoor "poor" will be such that it will force the Commissioners to revise the system and ultimately to reassess the return of outdoor relief.

b. The Outdoor Relief Officers:

Not unlike today, the weekly dole to pensioners was provided by "agencies". At the time, they were called Relief Offices and were run by the Guardians. In the various offices scattered around Hackney (9 between 1837 and 1894 and then 11 until 1929), Officers and Attendants respected the following duties, first once a week, then four times a week: "Keep order in the waiting room, regulate the applicants who appear in front of the Outdoor or Workhouse Relief Committee, answer enquiries, register and pay the established relief, &c." (October 20th, 1840) When the number of outdoor applicants reached dramatic levels by the end of the century, the Guardians, with the approval of the Local Government Board, organised for the first time the relief to pensioners at the post office.

2. The growth in complaints:

a. The emotional reality:

This system, which refused relief to any "migrating" pauper, was to end very soon. The reasons for going back to the old system of outdoor relief for all were quite obvious. The industrialisation of towns and the increase in urbanisation explain it quite well. But what prompted the Commissioners to readjust their position were endless reports of cases like this one: In a letter to the Commissioners of August 6th, 1839, the Guardians asked advice regarding the future of "two abandoned children who did not belong to this Union and to whom we were forced, because of the law to refuse relief." The Guardians themselves were in a critical position, often receiving letters stating: "that several parishioners have lived as respectable housekeepers and have contributed to the rates for more than 50

years, surely they should not in their extreme old age be inadequately aided by the mere pittance of 1 shilling per week. Are you gentlemen so restricted by Poor Law Commissioners that you are unable to afford more efficient support to persons whose claims require more sympathy than mere paupers can excite?" (Letter by J. Young, Hackney, November 15th 1842)

b. The Imbalance:

After a lot of rebellion and critical reports from the Press, the Commissioners, pressurised by the severe depression and the epidemic of cholera of the early 1840s, drew a survey of the life in the newly United Parishes' Workhouses (1842). This survey established that of 1.33 million paupers only 199,000 were in workhouses —that is, about 85% were asking for outdoor relief. These figures are confirmed in Hackney: in 1840 there was 490 indoor paupers and more than 1,000 outdoor paupers, double the figure indicated earlier on for 1834.

c. The crisis over the Settlement Act:

This imbalance was accentuated by an increase in orders of removal and refusal of "migrating" or "unsettled" paupers. These orders were drawn by the Guardians on a daily basis. Here is an example: "As I am the Chief Payer to the Poor Rate of the Parish of Norton, to which Parish a woman named Esther Terry has been recently removed from your Parish, I was consulted by the Overseers on my return on Sunday as to the propriety of appealing against the said order —the woman does not belong to us, nor do any of the inhabitants know her" (July 27th, 1840)

The imbalance between indoor and outdoor poor, between pensioners and "unsettled" paupers led Parliament to realise that outdoor relief was of prime importance. It forced the Commissioners to issue an outdoor labour test order which allowed outdoor relief to all "able-bodied" men in return for work —generally of an unpleasant nature such as working on roads, breaking stones at the stone-breaking yard at Gainsborough Road (now East Way), oakum-picking or grinding bones.

3. The reasons and the change:

a. The Reasons:

Overall, the reasons behind the Commissioners' reluctance to change the system so as to accept outdoor relief for all lay in the fact that most middle-class people at the time were strongly opposed to the outdoor relief system. They feared that allowing a "dole" would automatically pervert the idle mind of the labouring poor. As Reverent Barnett puts it: "The weekly dole, or 'O.R.' (Outdoor Relief) administered by a Relieving Officer bound to suspect every assertion, brings out the greed of the applicant, destroys his self respect, checks his energies and has a distinct effect in keeping down wages."⁹

There were two other practical reasons for the change. First, the cost of outdoor relief was generally higher than the cost of indoor relief, as these figures in Hackney testify: Indoor Maintenance, £1,340 vs. Outdoor Relief, £2,214 (for the year ending on Michaelmas 1846). Secondly, the number of outdoor paupers was higher than the number indoors: 1024 (885 in Hackney plus 139 in Stoke Newington) vs. 437 for the same year.

This change of attitude in the Commissioners obviously threatened their credibility, to the point that in 1847, the Poor Law Commissioners were replaced by a Poor Law Board, of which certain members belonged to the government.

b. The actual changes:

On a practical level, the changes meant that each Parish revised its Outdoor system. Hackney reorganised its relief and distributing system to local "pensioners" five times:

In October 1848 by relieving paupers three times a week: on Mondays to paupers whose names started with the letters A to G, on Thursday from H to R and on Saturday from S to Z plus Stoke Newington "pensioners".

In 1861 when the Parish contributions to the Union were assessed on the basis of its relief expenditure and not on its rateable value: on its poverty rather than on its property.

In December 1852, by officially regulating the Outdoor Relief system in the Relief Regulation Order of December 14th, 1852.

In the summer of 1872, when the Poor Rate distribution was reorganised with the addition of the Metropolitan Common Poor Fund (which paid for schools, ambulances, fire station, &c.) and the Metropolitan Asylum Fund (which paid for local hospitals like the Eastern Hospital and the Infirmary).

And in December 1872, by working closely with the Parish Trustees in their work of defining the boundaries of the Parish, created in the same way that Trustees created "wards" and districts and appointed Relief Officers.

4. Comparison between Indoor and Outdoor maintenance:

As we have already seen, the cost of outdoor relief overtook the cost of indoor maintenance. However, the cost of maintenance per head remained obviously superior indoors. The traditional view that a pauper in the workhouse cost the average rate payer (in the second half of the nineteenth century) 4 shillings a week compared to 2 shillings for an outdoor pauper condemns the workhouse system as too expensive, but at the same time it points out to the increasing number of paupers claiming their weekly "dole".

This is particularly clear if one analyses the figures given every half-year by the Guardians. For the year ending Michaelmas 1882:

Indoor maintenance Cost of 888 inmates:	£6,222
Outdoor maintenance Cost of 4,400 paupers: (includes Outdoor Relief + Lunatics + Children + Acute Sick)	£6,204

This means that it cost the Union £7 per pauper per year to maintain them in the workhouse, and only £1.30 per outdoor pauper. This clearly shows that the workhouse system was inevitably doomed, and that outdoor relief was again the only solution for the future.

Tuesday September 13th

8. Health Care in Hackney 1834-1867:

The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act will bring some changes to the health care system in place in Hackney since the eighteenth century, especially outdoors.

1. Changes in Outdoor Medical Relief:

After several inquiries into the management of Medical Attendants of various other institutions, the Guardians decided to divide both Parishes into 3 Medical Districts: The whole of the Parish of Stoke Newington, all from Church Street to Upper Clapton and the rest from Homerton to Kingsland Road.

These districts were precisely divided. Each Medical Attendant had a set number of houses to attend and would frequently refuse to attend a neighbouring house if it was outside his district. The average number of cases dealt with by one Medical Attendant in the 1840s varied from 368 to 536 a year.

Every Medical Attendant was elected by the Board of Guardians and was responsible in front of them.

Under the new Poor Law, the Guardians' Medical Attendants also covered three new areas of work: The administration of vaccine, the establishment of a local sanitary administration and the removal of acute cases to specialised institutions.

The administration of vaccines to all parish paupers was imposed on the Guardians by the Vaccination Act of 1840. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth Century the Hackney Guardians provided free vaccine against small pox, cholera, &c. to all local paupers. The Medical Attendant was paid 2 shillings per vaccination. This situation, which created an increase in the work of the Guardians and especially of the Clerk employed by the Union, remained the same until the Ministry of Health took over the responsibilities for vaccination.

The duties of the Medical Attendant also included the establishment of his "sanitary area". Part of the job was to check the housing conditions of local paupers. In this instance, Hackney marked itself out from other Unions in London by expressing its opinion on this aspect of the Guardians' duties: Dr. Trip, the Medical Attendant, stated in an official paper that "there is considerable doubt in my mind as to the extent to which the [sanitary] regulations should be enforced in providing and keeping the sanitary arrangements of the poor in an efficient state". But besides voicing their doubts on the usefulness of this function, no change will occur.

The third new area of work is a consequence of the "sanitary" arrangements: the removal of acute cases amongst paupers, which was originally dealt with by the parish doctor. From 1834 until 1867, the Guardians handled the matter. Over that time, the Medical Attendant in charge of paupers only dealt with chronic cases. Any acute case, like any lunatic case, was immediately sent to specialised hospitals like the fever hospital, the small pox hospital, the lunatic asylum, &c.

However, the differentiation between acute and chronic remained vague, as this example testifies: A deaf and dumb Parish pauper was found on April 26th, 1848, after having swallowed a whole bottle of whiskey and without any further analysis of his case: "The 3 Medical Attendants in consultation, advised directly the Hackney Union Relieving Officer to

convey the case to the London Hospital having first used the stomach pump and extracted the liquor from the man's stomach."

2. Indoor Medical Relief: The Workhouse Infirmary:

The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act did not change the small, old workhouse Infirm wards, which formed the eighteenth century Infirmary. It is only much later, in 1867, that the Metropolitan Poor Law Act transformed it into a large local Infirmary, but this will be analysed in Part 3.

Until 1867, the Hackney Workhouse Infirmary carried on being managed by the Guardians, and more specifically by the Guardians' Infirmary Committee. This Committee supervised the work of the Steward, the Resident Medical Officer, the Medical Attendant and the nurses.

As before, the old Infirmary only dealt with indoor cases. These cases were never recorded in the Minutes, but from 1847, the Clerk took charge of listing every case. Here is a list of the general illnesses suffered by paupers and "cured" by the Infirmary, as defined by the Medical Attendant: "Fever, debility, debility from want, bronchitis, rheumatic gout, internal tumours, unable to work, natural decay, diarrhoea, consumption, mental derangement, mortification, organic disease..." (extracted from 52 reports from the Medical Attendant between 1847 and 1848) Although still primitive, the diagnosis of these cases is relatively better than for the first half of the nineteenth century.

Another epidemic of cholera swept through Britain in the 1840s. As we have already mentioned, Hackney Infirmary was not equipped to deal with the disease. However, the Commissioners this time ordered the Board of Health to create temporary infirmaries for the sick all through the county. The Medical Attendant, in turn, recommended a certain number of measures which seem to have had good results. These measures were to recommend brandy to anyone suspected of nurturing the disease, to discontinue watering the Parish road with sewer water but to take it from the water companies, to rub dry instead of washing the floors, and to provide enough ventilation throughout the House. The official returns of number of cases for this second wave of cholera show a substantial decrease, which could be attributed to these measures.

The period 1837-1867 was for the Infirmary a period when changes were being nurtured. The average number of beds remained small: between 30 and 40. An indication of the need for a new Infirmary is given as early as 1840 in a survey conducted by the Infirmary Committee suggesting the benefits of a possible extension to the Infirmary, but without giving proper directions.

Saturday September 17th

The Workhouse Population 1837-1867:

1. The Victorian poor population:

If we believe the Victorian popular imagery, the poor who lived in Union workhouses were, as Mayhew puts it, “of the lowest and most miserable class.” They looked like a menacing crowd of ragged shivering people “with bare feet, blue and ulcerous with the cold, resting for hours on the ice and snow in the street, and the bleak stinging wind blowing their rags.”¹⁰

Mayhew, who probably drew the first ‘sociological’ study of London paupers in his *London Labour and the London Poor*, calls the poor population susceptible to ending up in a Union workhouse the ‘street-people’. Among them are several categories: the street seller (of flowers, of ballads...), the street buyer (of old rags), the street finders (dogs’ dung, cigars), the street performers (acrobats, clowns...), the street artisans (mending things), the street labourers (crossing-sweepers, dustmen...).

To these categories Mayhew adds an alarming number of vagrants, vagabonds, mendicants, prostitutes, homeless wanderers and beggars who constituted the majority of applicants seeking relief from Union workhouses.

Not unlike the present day, there was in Victorian England a radical hatred and fear of this last category. The socialist and feminist writer Margaret Harkness noted in her novel, *Out of Work* (published significantly under the male pseudonym of John Law) the message of an observer: “It was a nuisance for the public to see so much misery. The outcasts must hide away in prisons or workhouses. So much scum was dangerous.”¹¹

This dangerous population was either very young (from 10 to 21 years of age) or very old. The young ones were generally robust and had learnt at an early stage to defend themselves in a society where very little was given to them. These abandoned children “as they grew old, became vagabonds or criminals and their shelter would then be the prison.” The very old ones had lost their main source of income and were generally incapable of looking after themselves.

The Victorian workhouse divided its wards according to the social status of the poor seeking relief. The first category of paupers registered at the *Casual wards* of the Union Workhouses. As we have already mentioned, the casual wards only admitted homeless people for a temporary period (generally one or two days). They were destined for the migratory population of the city and included, vagabonds, mendicants, Irish vagrants, and young countrymen. The Irish formed a large majority of the applicants for casual relief. The majority of them came from Ireland after the failure of the potato crop, increasing the number of poor in Unions all through the country. The average number of vagabonds relieved in casual wards in one night in an average Union in the 1850s varies between 10 and 50. Mayhew recalls the following statement of a young ex-Casual Ward inmate: “...there were as many as forty in the casual wards, men, women and children; in some, only two or three. There used to be part boys, like myself, but far bigger than I was; they were generally from eighteen to twenty-three: London chaps, chiefly, I believe. They were a regularly jolly set. They used to sing and dance a part of the nights and mornings in the wards, and I got to sing and dance with them. We were all in a mess; there was no better or no worse among us.”¹²

The second category of paupers registered at the *Tramp-wards*. These wards, not always built alongside the main buildings, received the great majority of English tramps, beggars, prostitutes, returned convicts and petty thieves. "Of the age and sex of tramps, the general proportion seems to be four-fifths male and one-fifth female. Of the female English tramps, little can be said, but that they are in great part prostitutes. The proportion of really destitute women in the tramp-wards is greater than that of men. Girls of thirteen years old, who run away from masters or factory employment, often find shelter in the tramp-wards."
 13

The third category registered for a longer period were looking for shelter, steady employment and enough to get by. For this category, the Commissioners established a seven-fold classification which resembled the one mentioned for the eighteenth century:

- Aged and infirm men
- Able bodied men and boys over 13
- Boys aged from 7 to 13
- Aged and infirm women
- Able bodied women & girls over 15
- Girls aged from 7 to 14
- Children under 7

This system was openly segregationist. It separated the couples (who only represented 5% of the population in Unions), mothers and children and elderly couples.

2. In Hackney:

The various categories proposed by the Poor Law Commissioners are confirmed by the statistics found all through the Minutes. However, the Victorian horror pictures of workhouse paupers has in this context a slightly different tone: A survey conducted in May 1838 and reported in the Guardian's Minutes classifies these outdoor poor in order of importance: aged and infirm, wives of aged men, abandoned and illegitimate children without parents and finally able-bodied poor.

Amongst these pensioners were some casual paupers who, temporarily out of work, sought shelter at the workhouse. The Hackney Union Casuals varied according to the weather and the financial climate of the time. The statistics for these in Hackney vary between 30 on a summer night in the 1830s and 515 on a harsh February day in 1848. Winter always saw an increase in the number of outdoor pensioners, casual paupers and admittances at the Workhouse.

b. The Indoor Poor:

In the workhouse, the dreaded increase of the Indoor Population, already analysed for the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth century, is followed on by a Tabular View reported in the Minutes on August 6th, 1839:

Date	Average	Men	Women	Girls	Boys	Deaths
1830	370	93	175	41	60	47
1835	345	86	153	41	59	21
1839	410	112	186	56	70	48

With this came one of the first analyses of the inmate population. The first classification mentions the number of inmates who actually lived in the workhouse and the average number of paupers passing temporarily through it. If in the year 1839, there was an average of 410 inmates, the actual number of cases dealt with was in fact 702. This difference explains the various debates around the real number of paupers in Britain. (The submerged tenth or the submerged 1%, as newspapers at the time argued.) The second classification

gives us the marital status of the inmates: in 1835 there were 132 widows, 54 single, and 53 married.

A second analysis compares Hackney's inmate population of 410 in 1839 with those of other Union workhouses. A survey conducted by the Guardians of Hackney a year later, in 1840, shows that the Hackney Union was an average scale workhouse: Poplar had 330 inmates, Bethnal Green 566, Holborn Union 600, Shoreditch 650, Whitechapel 970, Stepney 987.

Overall, the Indoor Population will not dramatically increase between 1834 and 1867. It will stagnate between 400 in summer and 480 in winter, never more. The "Great Depression" of the 1870s will bring drastic changes to the running of the workhouse.

Friday October 7th

Children of the Union 1834-1930:

As we have discovered, the workhouse population was mainly constituted of elderly women, widows and able-bodied adults. The child population will slowly increase all through the second half of the nineteenth century. It will become the second largest group of individuals relieved by the Guardians after the elderly and will always remain important in size and difficult to deal with. Here is an example of how a child ended up in the workhouse: "The Chairman of the Workhouse Committee begs to report that a male infant was brought to the workhouse on the 5 of December, having been found abandoned on the doorsteps of 72 Children Road by P.C. 86J, and that following the instruction of the Guardians a reward of £2 was offered for information as to the whereabouts of the parents and that the child was named Thomas Clifden." (December 10th, 1902)

1. Categories:

The main categories already analysed for the eighteenth century are the orphans, the illegitimate children with no parents, and the children of inmates. The Guardians did not drastically change this classification but rendered it more sophisticated, as this Official Return from the Workhouse to the House of Commons of March 25th, 1850 testifies: Illegitimate children with mother: 15, Children of widows: 15, children of widowers: 5, children whose father and mother are dead: 20, children deserted by father or mother: 23, deserted by both: 1, children of fathers in prison: 0, children of mentally ill parents: 5, and finally, children of able-bodied: 13. Overall 97 children were kept in the workhouse mid-century. This excludes the larger number of children sent to Union-run boarding schools. Alongside the various restructurings of the Board vis-a-vis their children, two acts reinforced their authority over these small paupers: The Poor Law Acts of 1889 and 1899 which authorised Guardians to become legal tutors of orphans until they reach the age of 21.

The system in place to deal with these various groups did not change either. Emigration, instruction or apprenticeship continued to be the methods recommended by the Commissioners in dealing with children. However, overall the rules were to be enforced:

2. Instruction of Union Poor Children:

a. Indoors:

The instruction of children in the new regime was to be more thorough and controlled. The Poor Law Commissioners required a precise account of the duties of the school master and mistress. They listed those duties in the following manner: "Instruct children in reading, writing and arithmetics, superintend that they are obedient and orderly, see that they are clean and neat in their person, hear the children reading the Lord's Prayers." (Letter from the Commissioners reported in the Minute Book, November 9th, 1839). A new duty was imposed "to sleep in a room which shall command a view of the boys or the girls sleeping room" (ibid)

The qualification of the schoolmaster was also checked by the Commissioners and later by the Board. An example of such examination is reported in the Minutes of February 28th, 1851, where The Government Inspector from the Committee Council on Education found that the Hackney Schoolmaster had: "Religious knowledge: fair, spelling: good, penmanship: moderate, arithmetics: good, grammar, history and geography: good, skills as a teacher: fair"

Another request from the Commissioners was to regulate the hours of instruction: “2 hours in the morning (between 10 and 12) to be devoted to writing and arithmetics, and 2 hours in the afternoon to be devoted to reading.”

After several months of this new regime, the Commissioners performed an inquiry, with a disastrous result: “A glance at your school is sufficient to prove that the instruction given is of the most limited character and the methods employed are not calculated to awaken the minds to activity and enterprise.” This bad report was followed by a series of recommendations; amongst others, that girls “should be taught the art of washing and ironing”.

This inquiry proved to be a severe blow for the respectable Hackney Guardians. They immediately ordered a Committee of Guardians to investigate other workhouse techniques in dealing with poor children. The result was a visit to Mr. Aubin’s establishment at Norwood, where 900 poor children were housed, fed and taught. Unfortunately, the Guardians only came up with a series of vague recommendations: “[We] should give them an education bearing on their bodily as well as mental faculties. [We should] also prepare them for filling situations in life which will raise them completely out of a state of pauperism and degradation.”

After several reappraisals of the Hackney Union teaching techniques, the Guardians managed to perform the duties ordered by the Poor Law Commissioners to their complete satisfaction. However, it seems that the lingering bitterness of this early Commissioner’s complaint stayed and prompted the Guardians to organise the education of children outside the Workhouse.

b. Outdoors:

The method employed was not, as in the past, to send children to specialised institutions, but to take over the control of schools and children’s homes. The Guardians hence took over the control of Chipping Ongar Children’s House and Brentwood School in Essex, as well as the next-door Sidney Road Children’s Home (now Cardinal Pole Catholic School). They also united for a while with the Whitechapel Workhouse in the running of what was once called the Forest Gate School in the County of Essex.

These schools were under the complete supervision of the Guardians. They paid a proportional amount of money to have the Parish children looked after, dressed, educated and sheltered.

The official returns from these schools show an increase in the number of Parish poor children, from 117 when the 1834 Amendment Act was passed, to an average of 580 all through the second half of the nineteenth century. At the turn of the century the number of children chargeable to the Union will exceed 900, implying a more complex distribution of children and funds between various schools, homes, &c. The schools became then either specialised institutions like Chipping Ongar or Brentwood, which were “industrial” schools catering for the children of the working classes, or general boarding schools for orphans.

3. Apprenticeship under the new Poor Law:

After boarding school, grown-up children were sent to neighbouring merchants as apprentices. If the Guardians decided otherwise, they would stay in the Workhouse. An inquiry by a Guardian Committee in December 1838 established that “the best plan would be to select 3 boys to go into the shoemaker’s shop, 3 boys in the tailor’s shop and 1 boy to

attend the Indoor Carpenter". For girls, the training offered either at Ongar or at Homerton were: "house-wifery", needlework, laundry, cooking, store keeping. The remaining children, who had not being allocated a placement either outdoors or indoors, would end up working in the workhouse garden or employed in the stone or labour yard.

Another form of apprenticeship, which was not chargeable to the Union, was the allocation of girls as servants to neighbouring middle-class families. Their number increased the already huge proportion of the Victorian population who were employed as servants. Organisations such as The Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants were constantly calling in at the Hackney Workhouse requesting that all orphan girls be given to them so as to train them into the "art" of being servants.

As the following example shows, the local gentry were also allowed to call in at the workhouse and ask for a girl: The Clerk once reported that "Mr. & Mrs. Carmichael are highly respectable and trustworthy and it was arranged that Mrs. Carmichael should go to Forest Gate School with the Master and select a child." (May 22nd, 1867)

When the "placement" was not successful, the Guardians had to take back the failed servant into the workhouse. This created a lot of problems as this report from the Maternity Sub-Committee shows: "Certain girls have failed to please their mistress, others came in through neglect of personal cleanness, feeble health, &c. ... [We] recommend to prevent as far as possible these decent young girls, on their return to the workhouse, from associating with the more vicious inmates." (June 23rd, 1909)

4. Imperial Emigration

From the accession of Victoria in 1838, transport to the Empire became a perfect way of getting rid of all that unwanted population which crowded mainland workhouses. An unprecedented number of charities established themselves as agencies for the new worlds, knocking at workhouse doors and begging for trade. One of these was the Emigration Home for Destitute Little Girls, who often wrote to the Hackney Guardians asking them if they had any girl who would "like" to join their "next party of children for Canada" (1872). Such parties were regulated by governmental organisations, not by the Guardians, so there is very little evidence of the future of these poor Hackney girls propelled by Victorian institutions into the new worlds. Obviously, the threat of prostitution did not cross the mind of the Guardians, eager to see the back of these girls who, even in the workhouse, did not pay their way.

When the number of children dramatically increased, the Union organised emigration on a grand scale: "parties of 12 children were sent to Canada under the supervision of Mr Merry of Miss McPherson's Home." (February 12, 1903)

Another way of getting rid of those "unfortunates" was to organise and pay "with their consent" the emigration of entire families to overseas colonies. The Guardians organised every step in the emigration process, because they knew that in the long run, to pay for fees, passports and fares would be cheaper than keeping whole families in the workhouse.

For these cases, the emigration procedures were generally dealt with by an Emigration Committee appointed by the Guardians. These, in turn, would contact emigration agencies, shipping agents, port authorities, and receiving bodies in the colonies. Hackney sent entire families to Canada, South Africa and South Australia. The average sum spent by the Guardians for a passage varied between £15 and £40 in the 1850s plus extra money which varied according to the size of the family and the port of destination. In 1851, 16 Hackney families, representing 60 people, were sent by the Guardians with the formal approval of

the Poor Law Board to colonies. It cost the Parish £460, a modest sum compared to the cost of maintaining them in the workhouse for a year.

5. Other forms of Emigration:

Anything went as long as the Guardians saw the back of these unproductive children.

Some boys were also sent to Army Bands: "Boys are now very much wanted for the Bands for the Army and the different Rifle Corps throughout the country, and those with a slight knowledge of music could forthwith get engagement in that line." (January 16th, 1860)

Some others were sent with the help of the Association for Befriending Boys to coal mines at Brighouse in Yorkshire.

6. The final measures:

During the overcrowded years, the number of children was such that the Guardians urged the neighbourhood couples without children to become temporary foster parents to poor children. The deal was to look after a child until he or she would be of age to go boarding school.

The whole poor relief and educational system, with its complex Poor Law ramifications, was progressively dismantled with the passing of Children Acts (1903) and the numerous Education Acts.

PART 3:

**HACKNEY CENTRAL INSTITUTION
1867-1930**

- 1. The Workhouse Population 1867-1930**
- 2. Insanity under the Union 1834-1930**
- 3. Union Life**
- 4. Towards Hackney Hospital**
- 5. The beginning of the End**
- 6. Towards the Welfare State**
- 7. A Workhouse in War**
- 8. Post War Changes**
- 9. Votes of Thanks**

Saturday October 22nd

Hackney Workhouse Population: 1867-1930:

1. The Overcrowded years - 1867-1930

The last time we mentioned the number of adult inmates in the Hackney Union it was 1837: 380. This figure will slowly increase over the years:

	Inmates	Infirmary
1845:	436	
1850:	476	
1856:	420	
1860:	518	
1866:	564	
1872:	491	
1877:	775	294
1882:	435	385
1885:	997	382
1887:	900	361
1890:	997	435
1902:	840	448
1912:	836	664
1920	1056	653
1930	1030	663

The various Official Returns give us the total number of paupers in receipt of relief. In addition to the inmates and sick paupers at the Infirmary, we now must add the children sent to schools (in Essex), the Insane and Imbeciles in asylums, the acute sick in acute hospitals, &c. Some of the former figures then read:

	Inmates&Infirmary	Schools	Asylums & Hospitals	Total
1877:	569	243	390	1202
1885:	1192	460	577	2229
1890:	1432	479	990	2901
1912	1500	846	1695	4041
1930	1693	293	1327	3313

These new figures exclude casual and non-settled paupers and the immense number of outdoor paupers, living on the Guardians' weekly dole.

Overall, the dramatic increase in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century is due to the famous "Great Depression" which brought an unprecedented number of farmers to the cities (the Lancashire Cotton famine of the 1860s), and created inflation, unemployment, &c. Another reason is the increase of immigrants from the continent which created the sweating shops, and provoked conservative reactions like: "The Board criticised the unrestricted system of alien emigration, saying that it is largely responsible for the present congestion of the labour market." (February 2nd, 1890)

The second wave of increase appears after the first World War, the reasons being here analysed in the chapter "A Workhouse in War".

These various increases forced the Guardians to constantly enlarge the institution so as to house all the paupers. A report from the Master of the Workhouse of February 29th, 1888,

clearly illustrates this: “that the number of applicants for admission to the casual wards is still increasing and the temporary provision made for their accommodation is no longer adequate. I would suggest that wooden platforms be fixed in the men’s waiting room, which would give sleeping room to a far larger number that can at present be received. ... We also have a larger number of applicants from men who have been refused admission at other Unions.”

This last remark in the Master’s report is typical from an East End Institution at the time. The number of inmates sent over by Poplar or Whitechapel during the overcrowded years is incalculable and so are the orders of refusals.

2. The Religious Creed:

Church Records are in this instance a very reliable source in the analysis of population. According to the Religious Creed Register, held by the Infirmary, the majority of inmates were Church of England. Baptists, Catholics and Jews were a minority. This is not surprising; Hackney residents were 95% Church of England, 4% either Wesleyan, Methodist, Catholic Apostolic, Congregationist, Lutheran, Unitarian, Baptist, Salvationist, &c. The 1% remaining were Jewish.

Over the years, the Guardians accepted the visitation of priests for other religious faiths into the workhouse. (The first of such visits took place September 2nd, 1850, when the Guardians formally accepted that priests from the Wesleyan Methodist Society could enter the premises of the workhouse in order to distribute religious tracts and exhort people into their faith.)

The Infirmary Creed Register gives an insight into the inmates’ religious creed. The few records left show the composition of the Workhouse at the turn of the Century: As in the neighbourhood, the majority of the inmates were Church of England. There were very few Jews at the Workhouse. The majority of Catholics, as Mayhew points out, were Irish.

The low percentage of Jews amongst the Workhouse inmates is normal. Jews had their own system of relief and their own shelters; however, such a low percentage is surprising. The coincidence of an army of unemployment, the competition with provincial factories, the influx of Russo-Polish-Jewish immigrants and the persistence of small-scale production created the sweat shops of East London. By the mid-nineteenth century, the scale of “sweating” became a major problem. Because of their number, the Jews were immediately associated with both the cause and the perpetuation of the economic evil -poverty. It is difficult to compare the living and working conditions of the “sweaters” with the inmates in the Workhouse. It is impossible to compare the life of a female inmate with the case of Elizabeth Killick:

“a poorly dressed woman of middle age, [who] stated that her husband, a boiler maker, had been in the Infirmary, three years paralysed, and that she received no money from his club because he had been ‘scratched’ there seven years. She was a trousers finisher, and could make 14d a day by working from 6 o’clock in the morning till eight at night, but out of that she had to provide trimmings – soap and cotton— and made only 1s a day clear. After paying 2s a week rent, she had 5 shillings a week to provide food, fuel, light and clothes for herself and three children.”¹⁴

Both cases had their own histrionics and can only add to the tales of misery that afflicted East London at the time.

Amongst the few Jews admitted at the Hackney Workhouse Infirmary, only 5% came from the Workhouse itself. And the majority of them were referred, not by a member of the family, but by a friend or by themselves. This confirms that the Workhouse only housed Jews who did not seek the Jewish relieving system in place. (Over the years this changed drastically. By 1930, the Hospital had a permanent Rabbi and hosted synagogue services.)

Finally, one case deserves to be mentioned: Hannah Game, who was born in 1829, who lived at the Workhouse between the February and March 1910 and who gave as a Religious Creed: "Independent".

3. The consequences of the Increase:

The increase in population did not change the politics of the Local Government Board who administered the Poor Laws at the time (1871-1919). In a circular issued in December 1871, the Local Government Board, in an attempt to reduce the number of paupers in statistics, recommended Boards of Guardians not to give relief so readily and without sufficient enquiry.

However, at a parliamentary level, several attempts had been made to curb the rise in the number of paupers:

The first one is the Public Works Act of 1863, which allowed local authorities to obtain loans so as to support public work schemes and to employ the "able-bodied" unemployed (a word which, it is significant to note, first came into use at the end of the nineteenth century).¹⁵

The second one was the Chamberlain Circular (set out by Joseph Chamberlain, President of the Local Government Board) in 1886, which encouraged different sorts of work for the poor looking for work.

The third attempt to modify the system came through the 1884 Reform Act, which had given the vote to working male householders in both the borough and county constituencies. This did change the position of the labouring poor in society, and will be the point of anchorage for the Welfare changes of 1906-1914.

Wednesday November 2nd

Insanity under the Union System: 1837-1930:

Part of the great “improvements” of the second half of the nineteenth century was the construction of purpose built county asylums. The first was at Hanwell in 1831, the second was at Colney Hatch in 1850, five years after the Lunacy Act, and much later the London County Lunatic Asylums of Banstead, Bexley, Cane Hill, Claybury, Epsom, Tooting Bec, Maudesley, &c.

1. The Union Lunatics in County Asylums:

a. Establishments looking after Hackney Lunatics:

As we already mentioned for the eighteenth century, Hackney poor lunatics were either sent to private mad-houses or county asylums, or they were left to wander in the workhouse. The ones sent to lunatic asylums had no control over which establishment they were sent to. When the various local asylums were full, the lunatics were sent wherever there was room for them. In 1846, after being refused at Hanwell and at several other institutions, Mrs May, a parish pauper, was sent to Langley Lunatic Asylum in Buckinghamshire. In 1888, the Union entered into contract with institutions as far away as Lancaster, sending there poor “patients who are not in the habit of receiving visits from relatives or friends.” (February 27th, 1888)

But most of them were sent to local institutions in the County: A report from the Board of Guardians of October 1850 lists the number of lunatics in their charge and the institutions who looked after them: 29 at Hanwell, 21 at St. John Miles House and 2 at Aubin & Co (56 in total). It also gives individual remarks: “apparently rational, harmless, not seen, no appearance of insanity, quite inoffensive, willing to work, industrious, apparently recovered, unsettled...”

As the century progressed, the number and type of institution receiving Parish poor would expand and become progressively more varied. “Scientific progress” would imply a better classification of lunatic inmates, with the distinction of epileptics —sent to a colony at Ewell—, “feeble-minded poor” —sent to the National Association for the Feeble-Minded in Shepherd Bush, &c.

The other main institution in charge of Hackney lunatics was The Metropolitan Asylum for Imbeciles of Leavesden, which housed 115 parish poor in the 1870s. (The Lunacy Amendment Act of 1890 then eradicated all “imbeciles” from workhouses.) The Leavesden Institution, which received a lot of lunatic children aged 5 onwards, appears in the Minutes to have had a very bad reputation. Amongst the various negative reports this one stands out: “[The father of a poor lunatic] was grieved to find that his son was in a wretched condition in a half starved state, with a bad foot and which in his opinion was caused by the boy’s having been neglected and that as he was deaf, dumb and blind he would not make any complaint himself.” (March 12th, 1873)

b. The harsh reality of the nineteenth century improvements:

The main difference with the past (before the Amendment Act and the Lunacy Act) was that the Commissioners and later the Poor Law Board with the help of the Commissioners in Lunacy oversaw each case reported by the Union. In capitalist fashion, productivity was of prime importance: the Commissioners often ordered some cases to return to the workhouse on the grounds that they could sustain the burden of work.

Ironically, when the new Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum opened in December 1850, its Medical Superintendent, in a desperate attempt to find “clients”, came to the workhouse and without the approval of the Guardians selected its first “patients”. The Guardians replied: “Some of them have been many years comfortably domiciled in the House and have been employed advantageously in a variety of ways and have been perfectly harmless, orderly and quiet and that unless they had hope of alleviation or cure, such persons might be seriously injured by removal to a Lunatic Asylum.” (September 1st 1851) After a series of letters, a deal was done between the “empty” Colney Hatch and Hackney to pass over all lunatics already held in private mad-houses to the new “superior accommodations” provided by Colney Hatch. Here again, financial considerations took precedence over the well-being of the “unfortunates”.

Until 1867, the Parish also kept a regular eye on these unproductive paupers. Nine years after opening, Colney Hatch housed 1,140 “inmates”. Amongst them were “21 males and 31 females” belonging to Hackney. As expected, the first reports from Lunacy Committees mentioned that “the attention of Officer Wards men and servants throughout the Establishment must be praised worthy to produce so much order, regularity and cleanness”. (October 19th, 1859) But 50 years later the reports were slightly different: “The Committee were not favourably impressed by the bedrooms of the female wards, which were dark and had only a small window, high up, the bedstead being very close to the ground, the room having a general depressing effect.” (February 12th, 1903)

Over the years, numerous political changes transformed the relationship between the Parish and its lunatics in asylums. The most influential change happened when the Metropolitan Asylum Board took over the administration of Lunatic Asylums and established a “scheme for the classification of mentally defective persons, involving the transfer of cases to various institutions and colonies”. (April 19, 1912) This takeover also meant that although still chargeable to the Union, lunatics were for the first time left under the exclusive care of centrally controlled health authorities.

2. Lunacy in the Union:

a. Definitions:

Indoors, the situation was different. A report from the Lunacy Commissioners of September 7th, 1857, clearly draws a picture of the type of indoor lunatic: “I have examined 5 inmates who are at present the only persons therein classed [by the Medical Attendant and the Guardians] as of unsound mind [3 males and 2 females]. The one named John Boys professes to have got rid of his delusions, but I am inclined to think that he merely disavows them, not wishing to be sent to the asylum. The nurse informed me that it is not a week since he gave expression to them. The other is a boy of 11, an imbecile. The third one is nearly 70 years of age and has a delusion that he is a grandson of the great Napoleon, but is quiet and harmless. The two females are young women congenitally imbecile who will soon be removed to a Metropolitan District Asylum. All these patients were at the time of my visit in various sick wards under the care of the ordinary nurses. This care appears to be adequate and satisfactory. The lunatic ward is now under the care of a paid attendant, but neither of them had any patient classed as of unsound mind therein.” (Extract from a report from the Commissioners in Lunacy, September 7th, 1857)

No other medical report is given of their state. One can only imagine that these “tamed” individuals had a good capacity for work and/or perhaps a particular relationship with the workhouse (a relative, a guardians, &c.) and had not therefore been removed to a lunatic asylum. Overall, it seems that the workhouse only kept those it could contain. A late

example gives us a quite clear view of the in-house lunatic medical attendant's limitations: "John Jarrett was admitted to the mental wards with acute Delirious Mania on the 15th inst. On post-mortem examination it was found that the underlying cause was Cerebro Spinal Meningitis. Every precaution has been taken to prevent the spread of the infection." (June 22nd, 1915)

b. Medically Monitored:

However, there was growing concern over the superintendence of these "idiot" cases: A letter from the Medical Attendant of the Workhouse to the Guardians of June 26th, 1850, provides us with an example of such concern: "Last Sunday an idiot in the House attempted suicide. The reasons which more particularly induced me to make my report are: 1. That although taken care of as far as the arrangements of the House admits, they have no proper superintendence or any treatment to ameliorate their condition. 2. They want employment but in instituting this, the Master finds his other arrangements frustrated. 3. [Some of them] are dangerous, requiring removal. 4. There is no proper male Lunatic ward. ... 5. A workhouse is not adapted for a lunatic asylum."

These concerns from the Medical Attendant sparked off several internal visits from the Guardian's Lunacy Committee resulting in reports and recommendations such as: "Provided it is deemed expedient to retain our chronic cases of lunacy and idiots in the House, it should be borne in mind that we have to deal with a class of cases, that although unable to reason with, and judge of matters as rational beings, yet that nevertheless they are not devoid of human feelings, but on the contrary in many cases they are rendered more acute, our aim should therefore be to raise them from their dormant condition and elevate them to a social position by making them feel they are still fellow creatures and not outcasts from society and to this end I should recommend to pay a full time attendant to the care of males and another to the care of females; that the day wards of the Insane should contain at least 200 cubic feet of space to each person and be placed in a cheerful spot overlooking the garden and railway, they should have the walls painted and decorated with pictures, and books, chess, building bricks and such amusements should also be provided; that the sleeping apartment should be supplied with means of washing and bedding, that the beds should be 3 to 4 feet apart, that the means of washing and bathing should provide hot water in winter and cold in summer, and that in no account should teasing, punishing the patients or seclusion should be allowed." (June 6th, 1860)

These recommendations were met two years later when The Lunacy Act of 1862 required to "transfer all the insane inmates from workhouses to asylum and vice versa..." In effect, the Act forced workhouses' infirmaries to pass the responsibility of indoor "lunatics" to a Metropolitan District Board and the charge of their maintenance to a Metropolitan Common Poor Fund.

This, however, did not put an end to the care of lunatics at the Workhouse Infirmary. In actual fact, the various cases that emerged amongst local poor who were not directly sent to county asylums carried on being dealt with by the Medical Attendant. Until the end of the workhouse system, the Medical Attendant carried on his duties, confining a few "lunatics" in B Block, to its basement "padded rooms", and assessing at the Mental Observatory Block whether any new case brought to him should be sent to a county asylum.

3. Some reliable and revealing facts:

A reliable but late source of information on these cases comes from The Infirmary Register of Death: 1896-7, 1914. A systematic survey of the causes of death at Mental Block of the Infirmary for the years 1896-7 shows the following causes of death:

- Delirium Tremens
- Senile Decay
- Cerebral Disease
- Inanition
- Cerebral Abscess

From 1914 each case at the Mental Block was submitted to a Coroner's Inquest. These Inquests led the Medical Practitioner responsible for the Register of Deaths to write down more specific causes of death, for example: cerebral haemorrhage, cerebral paralysis or softening of the brain. At the same time appear words such as 'microcephaleous' or 'epilepsy'. However, a certain number of causes of deaths remain vaguely mysterious:

- Suicide while of unsound mind
- Cerebral apoplexy accelerated by an accidental fall at the bed side
- Senile Dementia
- Cerebral Softening
- Senility
- Contusion of the brain from a fall out of bed

Some examples from the 1914 Register of Death speak for themselves:

- Kate Wright, age 35, died of acute mania and exhaustion on April 2nd, 1914.
- Louisa Walter, age 41, died of a fall in the ward, Accidental Cause, April 22nd, 1914
- Herbert Charles, age 12, died of 'marasmus, rejected by parents', October 4th, 1914.

Tuesday November 15th

Union Life:

1. The enforcement of the System by the Guardians:

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the Guardians, pressurised by central government, enforced their system of care and control.

One of the first measures recommended by the Poor Law Commissioners to the Hackney Guardians is given in one of their letters of November 1839: "The Commissioners desire to point out that rewards to paupers for service performed by them in the workhouse are contrary to the regulations of the Commissioners. The Union being entitled to the full produce of their labour in return for the maintenance afforded to them." In the same letter they reminded the Guardians that "paupers make very bad nurses and are by no means trustworthy, especially where wine and other stimulants have to be administered to the sick."

Amongst other changes ordered by the Commissioners was to allow only one day's holiday (i.e. outdoors) every month instead of one day a week when the Parish Trustees ruled over the workhouse, or to refuse applications for work in the casual —or vagrant— wards to paupers who had already applied twice in the same month or again to require inmates to give "168 hours of notice before taking their discharge from the workhouse".

Outdoors, the system was also enforced: Until the change-over in the law, the Parish Trustees were able to subsidise charitable private ventures (like ambulant soup kitchens run by charitable ladies) which provided local paupers with additional relief. This was stopped by the Local Government Board on February 6th, 1873: "[We] do not recommend subscriptions being made to the aforesaid kitchens, but that the Guardians should provide such means of relief to be under their own supervision and control." The Guardians stopped subsidising and did not take control.

Although mean in aspect, these measures were only taken to reduce the cost of maintenance and to "fight idleness".

Another way of fighting idleness was to allocate the right punishment to the right crime. As we already said, until the Amendment to the Poor Law, there was great difficulty in assessing what punishment should be given to what crimes. The Commissioners resolved the problem by creating a whole list of new punishments: amongst the many of them, Hackney applied the following ones: Confinement periods in the workhouse: between 1 and 6 months; confinement periods in cells: 6 hours for minor crimes and 48 hours for serious offences (the stealing of ale was frequent and was considered a serious offence).

Confinement in the workhouse was another characteristic of the new regime imposed in 1834. The inmates who were before more at liberty to leave the workhouse whenever they felt like it were suddenly required to apply to the Guardians for a written authorisation before leaving the premises temporarily. This created an endless bureaucratic nightmare, with the Guardians sometimes being forced to write for advice to the Commissioners, giving all the details of the inmate's history before granting authorisation.

But beyond the severity of measures and the punishment of crimes, what characterised the new regime most was the severity of the treatment of inmates. For example, the Commissioners little by little forced the Unions which provided the activity of picking

Oakum to enrol "certain females, certain boys and certain infirm men". (February 23rd, 1842) They also reduced the visiting times from 2 hours daily to 2 hours twice a week.

It is not surprising then that the Medical Attendant provided the Guardians with the following report: "Of the first class of inmates a proportion are admitted under circumstances of bodily weaknesses from previous illnesses, I should say that generally beer or ale is necessary and upon then, it would be well bestowed. Others who are in a state of debility, a degree of malt liquor may be said to be a requisite article of support, and in my opinion for such of the children afflicted with scrufulous disorders, beer is equally necessary." (March 23rd, 1842) On this subject, it is worth noting that by the 1890s, paupers were allowed, on special occasions to drink gin ("Unsweetened - 6 Gallons for a year"), port wine ("14 Gallons") and brandy ("Good Foreign - 56 Gallons").

2. Poor women:

As can be expected, the condition of poor women in nineteenth century workhouses was not an issue. Women did not have statutory rights or even the right to claim for them. This is true for female paupers and for female workers.

The Board of Guardians was exclusively composed of men. The first woman ever to become Guardian in Hackney was nominated by the Local Government Board on May 2nd, 1885: on that day, Miss Henrietta Mallory took her seat at the Board alongside 21 men. Later on, when the suffragettes had their way, the Board of Guardians included 3 women in 1899 and 6 in 1902.

The administration was dominated by men. The Master had overall control over his wife and over every single female worker in the House. We have to wait until 1893 to see the first "Lady Committee" in the workhouse, 1899 to see the responsibilities of the Infirmary Matron separated from the Master's control and handed over to a Lady Infirmary Committee and 1910 to witness the creation of the Women Maternity Committee.

The condition of inmate women appears quite clearly if we compare the living conditions of women and men. On October 2nd, 1850, an analysis by the Clerk of the House of the accommodations provided by the workhouse shows that women did not even have the right to a single bed each. In this report, there were 156 able-bodied men sleeping in 156 individual beds and 143 women sleeping in 68 double beds and 3 single beds. Women with children often slept together, and sometimes with another female inmate. Besides the evident cut in linen costs, this situation was imposed by the Guardians puerly as a way of "understanding", under the circumstances, the needs of female inmates for warmth and reassurance, notwithstanding the possible conflicts arising from such intimacy. A report from a Guardian Committee once observed the "very great evil and inconveniences of the lying women with their children being allowed to mix and associate with other inmates". But besides these observations, no proper change in the attitude of the Guardians towards a more decent set-up for female inmates took place. We are far away now from the imposition of a uniform to mothers with illegitimate children, but the social conditions of women in workhouses will remain the same until the abolition of the workhouse system.

3. House distractions:

The distractions in Victorian workhouses were rare. There are very few reports on how the inmates spend their rare days off, evenings or weekends. Visitors were allowed in the workhouse from 10 in the morning to 3 in the afternoon only (from October 10th, 1838) and then only two days a week from 10 to 12. Sunday was spent preparing for church, going to church and then eating dinner. From time to time a travelling troupe performed in the

House. Overall, that was it. Over the years, with the increase in social rights, the number of distractions became a more important issue, with visits to museums, to watch dress rehearsals at the Drill Hall, pantomimes at the Dalston Theatre, excursions to Clacton-on-sea, &c. The most important point here is that there was no committee in charge of “entertainment”, there was no occupational therapy. Any excursion, tea party or museum visit was the result of an external charitable act, (for example, the numerous types of entertaining work carried out in the Hackney Union by the Clapton Park Congregational Church).

The tools for distractions were also limited. It was only in 1839 that a lending library was introduced in the Workhouse. Before that, besides the Bible and Prayer Books, publications were not common items in the workhouse. The list of books provided by the lending library was sanctioned by the Workhouse Chaplain. And here is his first ever selection: “Homilies, Psalms, Gospels, Practices of True Devotion, Walton’s Life, The Duty of a Man, Selected Sermons by Wibon, Evidence of Religion, Narratives of Shipwrecks, Natural Theology, Columbus, Captain Cook, Burton’s History of the Church, Bingley’s Voyages, Beauties of History, Life and Death of Lord Rochester.” (February 6th, 1839)

The Garden represented, for those who could work outside, the only real tool for distraction. It was considered a sane and wholesome way of spending time. Workhouse gardens were famous for being extremely tidy and well looked after. It is difficult to imagine now the extent of these gardens. Before the building of the Infirmary there was a garden on the corner of Sydney Street (now Kenworthy Road) and the High St. There was a field between the male block (now G&H block) and the northern railway link. There was another field and a garden at the back of the female block (now F block) and Crozier Terrace.

All these fields and gardens were looked after every day. Several reports from the House Committee insist on how “nice” they look and what an advantage it was for the inmates to “be surrounded by such cheerful surroundings”.

With modern times, the indoor distractions increased and diversified. Some examples: On September 23rd, 1921, 130 inmates were taken in Motor Charabancs for a half-day outing to the beach. The same year saw the official introduction of a permanent indoor library (set up by C. Hewetson, Librarian of the British Red Cross Society, and ending up issuing 9,000 books a year in 1929). On June 18th, 1924, children over 10 years of age visited the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley. On December 11th, 1929, they purchased a Kodascope “to keep the mind of patients occupied”, and several wirelesses. There were also annual concerts by bands from the Metropolitan Police.

4. Work:

The best account of the work routine in the Union Workhouse is given in the Minutes on November 9th, 1887: “Every person [employed in the labour yards] will be allowed 1 hour for dinner namely from 12 to 1 o’clock. The door will be shut at 5 minutes past 1 o’clock precisely. No persons will be admitted without a card. Every person will be required to break either eight bushels of stone or pick four pounds of oakum, as the superintendent may direct. Each person shall measure or weigh the task performed by him in such manner and at such time as the superintendent shall direct and wheel or carry the same to the place appointed for its reception. Every person will have to remain in the yard until 4 o’clock. No smoking will be allowed in the yard. The superintendent will have no power to allow any person leave of absence during the working hours. Any person neglecting to work or to obey the orders of the superintendent will be at once dismissed from the yard and will not be readmitted without an order from the Guardians. Should he or she in consequence

become chargeable will be taken before a Magistrate and dealt with accordingly." The picking of oakum and the breaking of stone will be supplemented in the 1890s with the chopping of wood: "Every person is required to either saw sufficient wood for making 300 bundles or chop sufficient wood for making 900 bundles, or tie 500 bundles, &c."

5. Overall:

Overall, life in the Hackney Union Workhouse was better than in other workhouses in the East End. Although there was misery and drama, Hackney provided a secure, peaceful and controlled structure for anyone applying for relief. The gentrified area, the conservative Guardians, the high ground positioning of the House, the views, the gardens, made Hackney Workhouse, not a Victorian Rat-pit, but an economically constrained institution bound by puritanism and an over-powerful central authority.

As an illustration of this, we must point out that there was very little discord or violence in the workhouse. It was very rare to see the Master reporting a fight, a robbery or a crime. Here is one of the few examples found over 100 years: "that the Head Nurse had aided and abetted a pauper inmate in saucy language, abusive and insubordinate behaviour. She has been guilty of violent conduct, on the occasion complained of, by shaking her fist in the inmate's face"; the Guardians resolved that "the Head Nurse be suspended until next Board Meeting." (October 17th, 1866) The main source of problem seems to have arisen with the addition of the four blocks of the Infirmary. Apparently, unauthorised inmates frequently visited the Infirmary, turning the future hospital into "a loafing ground, [where they would be] soliciting, secreting food, lounging and smoking about the corridors and small rooms in the basement." (July 17th, 1912)

We must also mention here that although the system of punishment was enforced, the cellular wards in Hackney did not have the same effect in deterring casuals from applying as other cellular wards of other workhouses, which can probably be accounted for by the following causes: "the diet is better, there are neither locks or bolts on the door between the sleeping cells and the workrooms, and those detained on Sunday have 2 hours for exercise in the Yard." (from a report of the Superintendent Visiting Officer of the Metropolitan Casual Wards, October 7th, 1877)

Saturday November 26th

Towards Hackney Hospital: 1867-1929

1. Political changes:

The Metropolitan Poor Act of 1867 is the first explicit acknowledgment of state responsibility for the destitute sick. It made provision for the establishment of separate asylums for the care of the sick.

Before 1834 the destitute sick were left in their own homes with a pittance of medical and outdoor relief. Those directly admitted to the Infirmary, if able-bodied and following the traditional self-help ideology intrinsic to the original day-to-day running of the Workhouse, had to pay in hours of work for the medical relief received. (The system in fact was quite elaborate: the Overseers had to keep a strict account of the cost of food and relate it to the work generated by each pauper. This ratio was then applied when the pauper claimed relief from the Infirmary.)

Between 1834 and 1847 the practice of admitting sick paupers instead of able-bodied men into the Workhouse became common and general to the whole country. After 1847 there was a sort of silent revolution in policy: the able-bodied were evicted from the workhouses because of the overwhelming necessity of admitting the sick. By 1867, the Poor Law Institutions had become the first public Hospitals.

Between 1867 – the year of the act – and 1929, the administration of lunatic and epileptic asylums, of hospitals for infectious and contagious diseases, of orphan homes and hospitals, and of workhouse infirmaries was given to a central authority in London: the Metropolitan Asylums Board. The aim was to combine into districts (the Metropolitan Asylum Districts) the parishes and unions of the Metropolis for the reception and relief of “poor persons infected with or suffering from fever or the disease of small pox or who may be insane.”¹⁶

This new central authority meant a loss of power for the Guardians. For the first time, the Guardians did not control the life or future of their sick paupers. Locally, the new scheme created Permanent Medical Relief Lists (or “Street Lists”) in each Medical District. Nationally, they lost even more power when the payment for the maintenance of sick paupers stopped being individual (i.e. X amount of relief per person chargeable to the Hackney Union) and became an annual subscription (1917). (This system, of course was more economical and less bureaucratic – roughly £10 to £20 per annum per hospital or asylum for the same year).

The change-over in the control of the running of the Hackney Workhouse Infirmary represented a major shift, which ended up creating Hackney Hospital.

Besides the Hackney Guardians’ response to the new Metropolitan Act, which was that “it will cast an immense unjustifiable burden upon the rate payer” (August 29th, 1867), the Hackney Infirmary was considered as being built on the principles of scientific hospital construction and was therefore a perfect example of this change-over from workhouse to local hospital. But one element needed to change: Hackney Infirmary had been conceived as a hospital for the reception of elderly or sick inmates, not for local sick paupers, who were sent to Poor Law Hospitals. This change would only effectively take place when the cost of running the Infirmary became more important than the cost of running the Workhouse.

2. The Erection of the Infirmary:

The erection of the Infirmary Blocks was not given to the architect in charge of the Workhouse modifications, but for A & B Blocks to W.A. Finch of Homerton and their contractors Mr. B.E. Nightingale (*sic*), and for C & D Blocks to Lee & Smith.

Both architects were local specialists in the building of institutions. Lee & Smith, for example, built institutions such as schools and alms houses in Hackney, Hoxton and Shoreditch (relief offices). Although prestigious, the profession of official architect for Boards of Guardians was badly paid. They generally received 5% of the total cost of the building work.

The building of the four blocks (A,B,C,D,) took over 40 years from 1869 to 1910. Over that period, the Infirmary was to turn itself from a small house with only four wards, each 21 feet by 19 feet, to a fully functioning, grand scale local Infirmary.

It was actually a recommendation from the Commissioners which prompted the concept of a large Infirmary: "The Commissioners are persuaded that it would be found more convenient and economical to have the sick wards together in one or two building(s) and not to have the patients dispersed in various parts of the workhouse. They suggest, therefore, that the new Infirmary, instead of being merely auxiliary should be made adequate to all the wants of the House and of the United Parishes." (September 2nd, 1846) The dates for the four blocks are respectively: A: 1896, B: 1869, C: 1911, D: 1907.

The first block to be built (now known as B Block) was finished in 1869. It was built on a piece of land previously occupied by an old pub called the Homerton Castle. (By no means a relic of feudal times, but an ordinary dwelling house with a castellated structure.) This first block received very positive reactions from the Poor Law Board. But the Local Government Board, which replaced the Poor Law Board in 1871 thought otherwise; they recommended "that although the new building has greatly improved the accommodation, the Infirmary is still inadequate to the requirements of the Union which, with a rapidly increasing population are becoming month by month more urgent." (January 15th 1878) This recommendation was to prompt the erection of three other blocks.

It is only when part of the main Workhouse block (the U shaped building) was pulled down in 1897, that A and D Blocks were built, as well as the Infirmary's new administrative building (1906). D Block took over 10 years to complete due to complicated purchase procedures of the whole row of houses on Crozier Terrace, and C Block was the last one to be built (finished in 1911). The uniformity of the four blocks was established a long time after A Block had been built. There was no original planning; when D Block was proposed, it occurred to the Guardians to build it following the same "style" as A Block. Lee & Smith, the architects of C & D Blocks were therefore forced to follow the specifications of his predecessor, W.A. Finch, who had built the first pavilion, B Block.

G&H Blocks, like E Block and F Block, were built by the Workhouse architect (Ashpittel & Co.) as wards for able-bodied paupers. (See the chapter: The Building of the Union Workhouse) They only became part of the Infirmary when the Workhouse system disappeared in 1929.

Although the building took over 40 years to be completed, the style was purposely chosen right from the start. In fact, the construction of the Hackney Infirmary is based on the ideas developed by the 1868 Official Memorandum intitled "Points to be attended to in constructions of workhouses and infirmaries." This memorandum insisted that it was no longer acceptable to separate the various classes of paupers within one building, but to

provide separate buildings for different classes. To this effect, it proposed what was then called the Pavilion System. The main characteristic of the system was that the pavilions were blocks without halls which could hold a maximum of 200 healthy or 100 sick persons and were spaced out in parallel rows, connected only by walkways.

The actual planning of A & C pavilions, as they were originally called, received a great deal of attention, as this report testifies: The Visiting Committee of the Hackney Union Workhouse recommends that "the area of window space should not be in greater proportion than the rate of 1 superficial floor to every 70 feet of cubic space in the wards. ... The architect's idea of placing windows 12 feet apart from centre to centre implies having 2 beds between them, not more than 20 inches apart, which is objectionable." (March 31st, 1879) The Guardians also "believed that a good supply of light, food and pure air are important factors to restoration to health in those who have in a great measure lost it through imperfect sanitary surroundings." (April 14th, 1879) Overall, the main regulations were that the height of the wards should be at least 11 feet, their width should be 24 feet minimum, the wall space between the beds was fixed to 6 feet and the cubic space per bed should never be less than 850 cubic feet.

Each building was originally intended for specific purposes. The architects could never have imagined that their scientific, purpose-built pavilions would accommodate themselves to so many changes. Here are roughly the original purposes of each block: B Block was a poor sick "male" block with padded rooms for male lunatics in its basement, C Block was designed for poor sick "females", D Block was a maternity unit and A Block was for the elderly, except the ground-floor wards which were designed to treat the sick staff.

Overall, the construction of the Hackney Infirmary had been a long but easy venture. Although not originally intended, the four blocks became a sort of landmark in the area. There is Hackney Hospital with its castellated roof ironwork, its corner towers, &c.

There also seems not to have been much opposition to the construction of these "fortresses". The only one emerged from the Borough of Hackney Rate Payers Protection Association who complained about the construction of C Block. The Guardians' answer to this complaint highlights the spirit in which the four blocks were built: "For many years, the Guardians have received repeated complaints from the Local Government Board and the Lunacy Commissioners, as well as from their own officers as to the inadequacy, unsuitability and insanitary conditions of the old buildings at the Infirmary. [The remains of old Workhouse, pulled down in 1910] ... It is estimated that when Pavilion C has been erected, the accommodation for patients in the 4 pavilions will amount to 750 beds. ... In conclusion, the Guardians are confident that the rate payers of Hackney will agree with them that it is in the interest of economy and good administration, and necessary for the proper treatment of the sick poor that suitable and adequate Infirmary accommodation should be provided without delay." (June 2nd, 1909).

3. Social Changes vis-a-vis Medicine:

The first signs showing the desire of the Guardians to have an Infirmary running like a professional Hospital and not like another ward within the workhouse came with changes in the perception of health and illness.

Sterilisation, anaesthetics and general hygiene became major issues in the running of the Infirmary. The first of such basic health improvements was provided by the Certificate under the Sale of Food and Drugs Act of 1875, which forced the Infirmary to maintain, amongst other things, a regular analysis of the milk consumed in the Infirmary. Another improvement was the introduction of a series of specific diets for the Infirmary's various

sick cases. Unfortunately there is no indication of how different the Infirmary diet was from the one provided by the Workhouse.

These social changes also implied the introduction of new equipment. The laundry added to its wash and drying rooms, hydro-extractors, fan rooms, steam dollies, hand mangles, marking-linen machines, &c. The Infirmary introduced waterbeds, wheel-chairs, screens between beds, carrying stretchers, enamelled trays and bowls (instead of pewter), disinfectors, waterproof sheeting, rubber water-beds, fire alarms, &c. Obviously the most important improvement was the introduction of electricity and of the telephone in 1906.

With the advent of electricity came a laboratory in 1912; sterilisers, electrical lifts (instead of hydraulic), ultra-violet lights, the X-Ray department in June 1919, the motor ambulance the same year, an ice-making plant in 1921, a Bacteriological Incubator in 1926, equipment for a permanent indoor dental surgeon in 1930, new operating theatres in 1931, &c. It also meant a better understanding of equipment, medicine and forms of treatment. For example: "Owing to the uncertainty of many disadvantages attending disinfection by sulphurous acid gas, [The Medical Superintendent] recommends a solution of Formalin for future use." (July 17th, 1912).

4. From Infirmary to Hospital:

Before the formal change-over in 1929, which is analysed in the last chapter, two important elements mark the passage of the Union Infirmary to a local Hospital.

The first is the expansion of the training school for nurses which took place in June 1919, when the City of London Nurses, who studied at the Old City of London Union (appropriated by the War Office during the war), were transferred to the Hackney Infirmary. This implied a more rigorous selection of its staff, with examinations from, for example, the Central Midwives Board, the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, &c.

The expansion implied the planning of a proper Nurses' Home. Until 1929, of the 317 Infirmary and Workhouse nurses, 108 were housed in an old nurses' home on the west side of the site, 78 in a row of old cottages in Sidney Road (now Kenworthy Road) and 14 in the administration block. (The remainder were non-residents). The addition of the City of London Nurses was to prompt the erection of a new block: the existing Nurses' Home built after the change-over in 1937.

The other important change was the actual renaming of the Infirmary. This symbolic passage was celebrated with the erection of a new front entrance, new porter's lodge and receiving wards. Proposed in 1924, the new building's design was imposed by the Ministry of Health. Fearing a negative public reaction against the extravagance of a new building, the Minister recommended "that the new building should be erected in a form which would not so directly compete with housing, as for example a steel frame construction filled with concrete." (April 9th, 1924)

No longer administered by Poor Law Authorities, but by the Metropolitan Asylums Board, the Guardians inscribed on the new front entrance a new name: Hackney Hospital.

To celebrate the new front entrance, the Board of Guardians invited H.R.H. The Prince of Wales (the future Edward VII) to inaugurate the "reconstructed" Hackney Hospital on February 15th, 1927. The visit turned into a party of 500 guests with bands, drinks and the catering of 4,000 assorted pastries and bridge rolls. The Prince was given a steel key as a memento of the occasion.

Monday December 5th

The beginning of the end:

1. Firsts steps towards a Reform of the Poor Laws:

The Great Depression of the 1870s and 1880s, like the 1830s depression which led to the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, prompted Parliament to conceive another system to relieve the poor and to solve the problem of unemployment.

After 70 years of trying to deter poverty through workhouses, asylums and houses of correction, a new system was needed. The old 1834 Amendment to the Tudor Poor Laws did not match the economic and social realities of the industrial revolution.

The main point here is that the 1834s Poor Law approached the problem of unemployment and subsequently of poverty by trying to frighten the poor into work. (The workhouse still represented the ultimate failure for an unemployed person.) But by 1880, it was plain evidence that the workhouse system could not and would never meet the increase in population and that there was no point in frightening an industrial worker into finding work when there was no work available. All in all, the problem was not so much what to do with poverty but what to do to prevent poverty.

This appears to have been a major source of anxiety for the Guardians of the Hackney Union. After 60 years of the relief system, the Guardians were nearly overnight forced to reinvent their approach to unemployment. For the first time, their role was not to provide relief, but to provide work. A letter to the Guardians from Reverend J.H. Belcher of December 9th, 1893, highlights this: “[I] urge upon the Guardians the necessity of finding work for honest starving men and to impress upon them that the Statutory Law and Regulation of the Local Government Board recognise them as the authority to deal with this serious and difficult problem.”

But this urge to change the role of the Guardians implied a completely new system of dealing with paupers. A few weeks after the Reverend’s letter, the Guardians passed a resolution stating that they “decline to express their opinion on whether to grant a change in the policy and administration of the Poor Law in order to provide work and wages is a desirable thing or not, and whether, if so, it should be made without legislative authority”.

Besides their reluctance to face the new reality, the Guardians were forced to take temporary measures, such as leveling the wages of men employed at the Labour yard with the rates put forward by the Trade Unions. Another measure was (after carefully conferring with the local authorities) “to arrange the execution of works for which unskilled labour may be employed” (the repairing of roads, Hackney Marshes, &c.). A few months later, the Guardians even hired 50 acres of land for spade husbandry.

2. Pressures and Local Changes:

As well as letters sent by the local gentry pressurising the Guardians to remove paupers from the street (the threat of “outcasts”), there was the progress of the working class in their battle for human rights.

These materialised in Hackney with a number of conferences, symposiums and meetings. Amongst the various talks to which deputies of Guardians were sent, it is worth mentioning the Society of Poor Law Workers Conference (1902), Greenwich Union General Conferences

of Guardians (1903), Metropolitan Poor Law Conference (1915, 1919), People's League Conference (1924), &c.

On a national level, several acts enforced the rights of paupers: The Children Act of 1904, which declared that no child under 11 years should be permitted to engage in labour, The Education Act of 1906, The Unemployment Workmen Acts of 1905 and 1927, The Factory and Workshop Act of 1907, The Old Age Pension Act of 1908, &c.

On an administrative level, the last important change to affect the Union was the change-over of Counties, and the creation in 1900 of the Boroughs of Hackney and Stoke Newington.

Until 1899, Hackney and Stoke Newington, like the rest of London, belonged to the County of Middlesex. From the turn of the century, the united parishes belonged to the newly formed London County Council. Although in appearance only an administrative change-over, this constituted an important step in the history of Hackney and of the Union in particular. To suddenly be attached to a smaller and more powerful county – London – killed off all attempts to mark Hackney out from other Unions in the County. It was as if the inclusion in the County of London of a once distinctive and pleasant parish had generated a loss of identity, which would make drastic social changes less important elements in the daily life of the community.

The increase in the number of paupers within the newly formed County of London generated several local acts to alleviate the Guardians in their task of providing relief. Amongst the many acts, the most important one for Hackney was the Local Government Act of 1888, which provided the L.C.C. with the power of distributing grants to Unions within the County. These grants were purely destined to equalise the standards of maintenance of paupers indoors. Overall, the idea was to make sure that each Union provided an average maintenance cost per day per head.

3. The Balfour Royal Commission:

To provide jobs and not relief was the new issue in the debate around poverty, whether locally, through conferences, or nationally, through the passing of an Act. It led Balfour's Government to organise a Royal Commission in November 1905. As in 1834, the aim of the Commission (which was seen by most at the time as a socialist attempt to reorganise society) was to establish a report and propose a new system where poverty was no longer considered the result of idleness and drunkenness.

Their research was made easier by the numerous reports made at the time on poverty (Henry Mahyew, Charles Booth, William Booth) and on the working class in England (Benjamin Seebohn Rowntree, Sir Frederik Maurice for the Boer War Recruitment survey). These surveys reported that the main reason for the increase in poverty was not an increase in the deprivation of the poor, nor their idleness, but low wages, irregular work and the size of families.

It is important to note here that these issues were actually discussed by the Guardians. For example, a special Committee was formed for this purpose on December 3rd, 1890, to "consider some particulars of our administration of the Poor Law in the light of reform suggested in General Booth's Darkest England". A year later a Committee of Guardians attended a conference on Poor Law Reforms at the City of London Union, &c.

Because of a schism amongst the members of the Commission and because of the extent of the survey, two reports emerged from their research: the Majority Report and the Minority Report.

As in 1834, both reports criticised the existing Poor Law system. The main criticism was that the 1834 system lacked uniformity and that lunatics had still not all been sent to asylums. Its most influential propositions were that poverty was reprehensible, that a new name should be given to "Relief" (Public Assistance), and that overall the workhouse system should go, that the treatment of inmates should be curative and restorative.

However, there were substantial differences between the two reports: one concluding with a restructuring of the existing Poor Law, the other seeking to dismantle the Poor Law machinery completely. In the event, neither report was put into effect; the reports only managed to antagonise both the Boards of Guardians and the Local Government Boards, and put into question the government's administration of poor relief and unemployment.

Besides sending letters of sympathy to the family of Colonel Charles Booth at his death, the conservative and rather puritan Hackney Guardians did not latch on to the new ideas proposed by the Royal Commissioners. They carried on using the old term "able-bodied", refusing to accept the new term "unemployed", and generally perceiving the purpose of the workhouse as a tool for deterring poverty. Commenting on the report, they thought that "any change in the Poor Laws should be made so as to obtain a more adequate control of able-bodied by means of compulsory detention where strict discipline can be enforced with suitable industrial training, and with the consolidation and codification of the laws relative to the relief of the Poor". (May 3rd, 1906)

Thursday December 15th

Towards the Welfare State:

1. The Context: the Liberal reforms:

The defeat of the Conservatives in the General Election of January 1906 brought about a number of extremely important social reforms, foreshadowing the end of the Poor Law system. These reforms were the result of the changing social attitudes of the time and the politics of the Liberals, Lloyd George and Churchill. Amongst the very many social reforms, three Acts need to be explored:

The Pension Act of 1908 is one of the first to touch the very much criticised Poor Law system ruling the Hackney Union. It brought in a non-contributing scheme of pensions (5 shillings per week to those of 70 years of age or over, with a reduction depending on any wages still being earned). The idea, as Churchill pointed out, was to provide a “life-belt” intended to help the poorest. The most important aspect of the new scheme was that pensions were to be provided out of national and not Parish funds, and paid at the Post Office. This was to change the concept of Poor Relief drastically. It allowed elderly people who refused to seek help from the poor law authorities to accept a pension scheme; it also –inevitably– reduced the number of indoor able-bodied elderly inmates in workhouses.

The Labour Exchange Act of 1909 dealt exclusively with the casual poor. It enacted a national system of exchanges which allowed men in casual employment to move quickly from one job to another, therefore reducing the number of casual applicants at workhouses. This also spared workers from tramping from one factory to another in search of work.

The National Insurance Bill of 1911 was divided in two: The second part complemented the Labour Exchange Act by proposing a solution for the long-term unemployed who, after applying several times for casual relief, were forced to enter the dreaded workhouses. The basic principle of the scheme was compulsory insurance against unemployment in trades where unemployment was known to be a common occurrence. In other words, it protected the worker of certain trades from ever becoming an indoor pauper.

The First part of the Act related to insurance against ill-health. The basic idea was that everyone earning up to £160 a year should be compulsorily insured against ill-health. In other words, wages were for the first time deducted by 4 pence, with the employer paying 3 pence and the state 2 pence towards the insurance against the ill-health of workers. This ended up changing how people perceived Infirmaries and Hospitals. They became places of last resort.

Although it is true that the new system only treated the illness when it occurred, and failed to improve the health of the poor, it changed the perception of medical relief. Workers who suddenly fell ill would enter infirmaries not as charitable organisations, but as places which they financially participated in maintaining.

Overall, the Liberal reforms were the first attempt to deal with poverty outside the Poor Law system. They did not seek to replace it, but to bring together the elements that would end it.

2. Hackney’s Response to the Liberal reforms:

Overall, the Guardians were not happy with these social reforms. They threatened their power and above all their future. The main arguments against these Bills were around the idea of transferring their powers to other authorities. The West Bromwich Union once joined forces with the conservative Hackney Guardians to “emphatically protest in Parliament and to urge the passing of a resolution providing that the powers which the Guardians already possess, be extended.” (June 13th, 1912, in relation to the Mental Deficiency Bill)

Reluctant to change, but overall quite amenable when it came to collaborating with the government, the Guardians, after several years, finally acknowledged “the humane manner in dealing with the health of over a million men and women in the country at the various Labour Exchanges.” (April 9th, 1924) They also noted later on that “the administration of relief other than institutional [therefore in work] to able-bodied men and their family consequent upon the present depression of trade and resultant wide-spread unemployment and the prolonged long period over which such relief has extended, constitute exceptional circumstances rendering it expedient to adopt.” (May 23, 1924)

Tuesday December 27th

A workhouse in War:

The social reforms were put to an end by the First World War. The end of the Poor Laws was postponed for another 10 years.

1. The Poor and World War I:

There was a good deal of popular support for the war; the announcement of the British declaration of hostilities provoked a rush to the recruiting offices. Above all, it provided unemployed and unskilled men and women with temporary work.

The basis of the economy at the time was exclusively geared to the needs of the armed forces. Overall, the various government-controlled railways, munitions factories and mines, the increase in the number of industries, the forced conscription, all contributed to a decline in pauperism.

It also appears that against the traditional belief which concentrates on the high cost of food during the war, the rise in wages kept up with prices over the war period. This was not good for Poor Law institutions. Unlike factories, their general income came from yearly established rates, and these did not take the increase in the cost of living into consideration.

2. Hackney and World War 1:

Patriotism aside, Hackney Union overall suffered from the war. They had to see their number of inmates rise to include paupers from other unions, they also suffered cut-backs in staff and in money. And they were forced to restructure themselves.

“It is generally admitted as a principle that all classes should at the present time join in bearing their share of the common burden laid upon the Nation.” This sentence, written in the Minutes on April 14th, 1915, illustrates the spirit in which sacrifices were made. The types of sacrifices are quite obvious: The Guardians closed down the stone and labour yards and suspended all building and decorative work (because the Local Government Board urged them to refuse permission to enlist male labour of high quality), they suffered from the lack of eggs, cheese and general groceries (which implied a better garden out-put at Brentwood), they deprived themselves of land at Chipping Ongar’s School, they lived without proper protection against air-craft attacks, they saw their staff leave to serve in the army, in the Red Cross and in munitions factories (which implied allowances for forced leave of absence) and above all they forced the remaining staff to contribute to the war by purchasing war loan vouchers.

On top of these sacrifices, there was an increase in the number of indoor poor. These were sent by other Unions. Between 1915 and 1919 they housed all the indoor poor from the City of London Union, which transformed itself into a temporary military hospital. For the same period they received an undetermined number of paupers from various horizons, such as the colonies, the hospitals and homes which were requisitioned temporarily by the War Office. (As mentioned earlier, they received “sane female epileptics” from the Kingston Union.)

The increase in the number of inmates was also due to orders of removal from the War Office. On May 31st, 1915, they were suddenly informed that they should receive indoors or pay relief or assistance to all Belgian, French and Dutch refugees. In theory, the cost of

maintaining such “alien” destitutes was repaid by the government, but it seems that the administrative cost incurred to deal with such cases implied a sacrificial restructuring of their relief system. In point of fact, it is worth mentioning here that the Prisoner of War Information Bureau once informed the Guardians “that they are wrongly giving assistance to the wife of an interned alien [i.e. German], and that assistance should be discontinued.” (March 31st, 1915)

3. Patriotic Union:

Besides these restructurings and sacrifices, the Guardians kept up with the burden incurred by the war. On Empire Day, they invited the wounded soldiers stationed in the neighbourhood to witness their ceremonies and to be entertained at tea by the Matron. In the half-yearly report of the House Committee of the autumn of 1918, the Guardians stated that “the general good conduct throughout the House has been maintained, considering the large number of inmates from the City of London Union”. The War ultimately ended, creating an unprecedented economic crisis, but with war bonuses and letters of thanks.

Overall, the war had revealed deficiencies in the organisation of the nation’s health and poor services. As soon as the peace treaty was signed, the case for an integrated approach to the nation’s health became accepted. This meant the take-over by the State of all Poor Law hospitals and schools, and the creation of the Ministry of Health in 1919 and of a centrally controlled Health Service.

Tuesday January 3rd

Post-War Social Changes:

1. The need for a new lexicon

It is well known that the period between the two World Wars was one of heavy unemployment. It also coincided with considerable economic growth. This paradox lies in the change in the social fabric of the time and the creation of a working class identity.

Between the wars, it also became slowly inconceivable that the unemployed should be sent to the workhouse for relief. The workhouses were becoming sick wards, infirmaries and, for some, general hospitals. The pre-War health insurance scheme remained and was run by approved insurance companies throughout the country.

The changeover from “relief” to “public assistance” implied not just the provision of a charitable donation, but a better understanding of the unemployed. Let us see how Hackney coped with this drastic change in the perception of the poor.

2. Hackney’s efforts:

The most important change in the Guardians’ books regarding the terminology used to describe the unemployed took place on May 13th, 1912, when the clerk announced that after a proposal from the Wandsworth Union, the word “pauper” in describing the chargeable poor was finally abolished.

The other main change took place on April 23rd, 1919, when again the Clerk officially barred the words “Hackney Union Workhouse” and replaced them with “Hackney Central Institution”. (More or less at the same time, other institutions changed their names, for example, when the London County Lunatic Asylums became the London County Mental Hospitals.)

Besides these vocabulary changes there was no strong reaction to the various debates regarding out-of-work donation schemes. We have to wait until 1921, when the Minister of Health announced, in a circular letter to all Unions, the creation of Works of Public Utility for the relief of the unemployed. The Hackney Guardians reluctantly reported their efforts in trying to adapt their old administration to the needs of the new generations a few months later. The report states the ways “in which the Guardians relieved the distress prevailing owing to unemployment: by the usual out-door relief to the unemployed men and their families, by the creation of General Industrial Employment in respect of new building work carried out at the Institution”: demolition of the old front block, creation of the Porter’s Lodge, reconstruction of the old laundry, repairs to the roadway separating the Central Institutions from the Infirmary. (September 22nd, 1921) These General Industrial Employments were provided to an average of 150 local men every week. The average pay then was 10 shillings a day. Another new form of relief generated by the unprecedented crisis was a winter allowance of fuel at the value of 2 shillings per week.

But it wasn’t enough. To be called “unemployed” instead of a “pauper” did not change the hard reality of the post-War out-of-work. Several deputations from the Hackney Unemployed Committee organised marches around the Institution so as to express their anger at the ways the Guardians dealt with their problems. One of them ended up by sending a deputation to the Board Room who addressed the Board stating that they “consider the relief granted to be inadequate and suggesting the following scale, viz: — husband and wife: 18 shillings per week each, single men: 30 shillings per week each and

children 5 shillings per week each together with fuel and rent; earning of wife to be ignored." The Chairman of the Board, in reply, stated that he regretted the position of the unemployed had not improved and that the Guardians were doing all in their power to relieve distress in the Union. (October 26th, 1921)

The Guardians were also pressurised by trade unions. The National Amalgamated Workers' Union kept sending letters to the Guardians requesting them to approve the reduction of the working week from 56 hours to 48.

However, Hackney's Guardians tried, and tried hard, to adapt to the industrial revolution and its social consequences. At their level, it meant small temporary initiatives, for example, the collaboration started with the Mayor of Hackney Distress Fund or with the Hackney Patriotic Ex-Service Men's Unemployment Organisation, a local charity. These small steps are proof that the Guardians, bound to their old dying system, were already aware of the end of their 200-year-old function.

Saturday January 26th

Votes of Thanks:

1. Final political changes:

In 1924, Joseph Chamberlain, President of the Local Government Board submitted a memorandum to the Cabinet outlining a reform of the Poor Law he wished to see enacted. Entitled the Local Government Act, it revised the rating system of the Poor Rate and made new regulations about roads, public health and other areas of work administered by the Guardians. Above all, it carried out the recommendations of the Balfour Commission, proposing to abolish the 642 Boards of Guardians and to transfer their duties to 62 Counties and 83 County Boroughs.

The Act was passed in 1929. The Guardians' duties were dissolved forever the following year, on April 1st, and passed on to the London County Council. The Act also included the transformation of workhouses into hospitals and the transfer of already existing Poor Law administered Hospitals and Workhouse Infirmaries to the London County Council, under which body they became Municipal General Hospitals.

The Local Government Act of 1929 did not, in fact, abolish the Poor Laws completely. The 100 year old amended Tudor laws only effectively died in 1948, when Parliament passed the National Assistance Act, which took all forms of cash relief out of the hands of local authorities and passed it on to a National Assistance Board controlled by the Minister of Pensions and National Insurance.

2. The end of the Guardians' duties:

The last year of the Guardians' life was an endless reappraisal of their role and duties. By virtue of the 1929 Act, the Ministry of Health tirelessly requested from them up-to-date statistics and inventories on their functions and powers. Their aim was to "unify the control of services under single administrative heads". 17

Practically, they forced the Guardians to formulate a general scheme for alterations and additions to the establishment. One was the replacement of the south end of the women's block (F Block). They also pushed for a restructured relationship between the two institutions: This led to the most important change: the acknowledgement that the Infirmary was a Hospital for the acute sick and that the "Institution", (i.e. the old Workhouse) was to become a Hospital for the chronic sick.

Regarding the other institutions and organisations managed by the Guardians, the Ministry of Health ordered that Chipping Ongar was to be passed on to the London County Council by the Board of Education, that the administration of the Old Town Hall, the Thomas Wyles Charity and the Saunders' Trust (another charity ruled by the Guardians) were to be made independent charities and that the administration of the Brentwood Branch was to be passed on to the London County Council.

Amongst the nine London "institutions" taken over by the L.C.C., Hackney Central Institution was probably the easiest to adapt. The Infirmary had already been renamed Hospital and the old wards on the south side, which formed the institution, were already receiving chronic cases. In a Ceremonial Pamphlet, the London County Council noted that the nominal bed accommodation provided by the addition of the Institution to the Hospital rose to 1272, that the average daily number of patients on the general medical and surgical wards was 632, that the maternity unit provided 52 beds, that there were 32 cots and 52

beds for pulmonary and tuberculosis cases (the remainder were 500 chronic cases) and that the dental, X-ray and electrical massage departments were amongst the most advanced in London.

This pamphlet could be seen as suspicious propaganda by the L.C.C., who were eager to prove the merits of their take-over, but it isn't. The Hackney Hospital Medical Superintendent himself noted that "The policy of the Board of Guardians had always been that their sick poor should receive the most modern treatment which scientific medicine and surgery can give. The result is that the Hospital is built, equipped and staffed so that this high objective can be maintained. As the Minister of Health recognised: 'The Hackney Hospital is a modern one.'" (February 9th, 1929)

Overall, the large new pavilions, the staff, the size of the site, everything implied the prospect of a long and bright future. A new name was proposed (St. Barnabas Hospital - but was rejected by the L.C.C.) and a new ideology was put forward: A report by the Clerk of the Council of June 24th, 1930, three months after the end of the Guardians' duties, stated that "the fact that the Central Public Health Committee now have the direction of a large number of Hospitals forming part of a united service makes a vital difference from the point of view of committee control. Each hospital is no longer an independent unit. Its management is affected by questions of general policy."

The only thing that perhaps was left behind with regret was, as the Clerk to the Public Assistance Administration wrote on May 14th, 1929: "the preservation of that human element which has always been a marked characteristic of the work of the Board of Guardians."

3. Votes of Thanks:

The birth of the "modern" Hackney Hospital inevitably also marked the end of a 200-year-old professional body: The Master and Matron, the Clerk, and of course the Guardians themselves: "It was unanimously resolved that a hearty vote of thanks be accorded to Mr. and Mrs. Elkingston for their efficient services as Master and Matron of the Hackney Central Institution and for the excellent manner in which they have assisted the Guardians, ... that a hearty vote of thanks and the Committee's congratulations be accorded to Miss. J.N. Richards, Superintendent of the Hackney Branch Home of Children for the very excellent services. The Committee also desire to place on record their high appreciation of the able and courteous manner in which Mr. W.D. Harris, Deputy Clerk to the Guardians has served the Committee. It was finally unanimously resolved that a hearty vote of thanks be accorded to Mr. F. Maynard for the very able manner in which he has performed his duties as chairman of the Committee." (March 31st, 1929)