

The History of Wimborne Workhouse By Janet K L Seal

The terms 'workhouse', 'poor-house' and 'hospital' seem to be interchangeable in medieval records. All catered for the needs of the poor, the sick and the homeless with varying degrees of kindness and efficiency. From catering for two dozen to two hundred souls, the housing of the destitute has been well recorded in the parish of Wimborne and later in an area encompassing many local villages. The gradual transfer of the responsibility for needy residents from the church to a secular committee of parish leaders can be traced by an addition to the rates for that particular purpose.

1483 Entry in churchwardens records 'ad finam occid 'Turris de Wymborn' referring to the workhouse called St Mary's house.

1479 St Mary's House mentioned by Hutchins as being a poor house. 20d rent paid by the Minster churchwardens to Lord of Hampreston. There may have been up to two dozen people there because in 1495 two dozen wooden dishes were purchased. John Cole and John Scote made doors with locks as well as an 'entirclos¹ in le workhouse.' Under the entry for year 1483 St Mary's House is mentioned as being at the end of the West



Tower of the Minster. From the known plans of the Minster there is no evidence that this house was built of stone.

It might therefore have looked like the adjacent sketch, the screen dividing male and female wards in a wooden annexe.

Sketch by author

1524 Wimborne church wardens refer to 'a tenement late called Saynte Marye House', an ancient hospital or workhouse for the relief

and employment of poor people. A tenement implies a separate building. This may be a reference to St Mary's chapel, a cell of Horton Abbey since before 1087 and then part of Sherborne Abbey, on a corner of the present square and West Borough.² It could hardly be described as being close to the Minster and therefore must be the site of the old chapel which had fallen out of use. (St Mary's Chapel was not mentioned in Pope Nicholas' Valor Ecclesiastica in 1291.)

¹ Screen possibly to divide male and female wards

² Dr David Reeve – examination of map held by Dorset History Centre.

1597 Poor Law Act - Parishes now became responsible for their own poor. The administration was vested in the church wardens and four unpaid overseers of the poor, appointed annually at Easter by the County justices. Their duties involved setting poor children to work and to provide adults with materials for manufacture. They were to relieve the impotent poor in case or kind and were empowered to build hospitals or 'working houses' on waste ground. Beggars entering the Parish were to be whipped and men refusing work were to be referred to the justices for committal to a House of Correction. A poor house was built out of the rates fund but the site of this is not precisely known.

1647 According to 'Extracts from the Minutes of the Standing Committee appointed for the Administration and Collection of Taxes in the County of Dorset' 1646-1650 in Watson Notes there is the following entry dated 7th April 1647. 'Samuell Ganden poor and impotent man ordered by Coll Bingham for the placing of him in the Town hospital of Wimborne, belonging to the manor of Canford Magna, stand in force and that neither Sir John Webb Knt nor any person under him, trouble or molest the sd (sic) Ganden, but permit and suffer him to abide in the said hospital without let or molestation, and that Sir John Webb, or his assignees do pay or cause to be paid unto the said Ganden the accustomed money due unto the hospital.'

The letter reads awkwardly but the gist would appear to be that although Samuell Ganden, probably mentally retarded or cruelly called an idiot, was a resident of Canford Magna owned by Sir John Webb, he needed to be looked after in the hospital of St Margaret and St Anthony on St Margaret's Hill in Wimborne at Sir John Webb's expense!

As he was not actually ill it is presumed that he joined those who needed a home and care who were sent to St Margaret's where there were several tiny cottages clustered round a small chapel. Here they would be cared for by a priest and the community in the ancient place originally built to accommodate lepers. The hospital had been suppressed during the Reformation in 1548 then re-opened under the control of the Kingston Lacy steward and the Constable of the Town. Other paupers are listed in the Wimborne Town Hearth Tax records of 1662 and are probably in receipt of 'out relief' payments. The alternative place where Samuell Ganden could have been sent was to one of six almshouses on Deans Court Lane. These had been built in 1560 by James, Lord Mountjoy, who was left the estate of Gertrude Blount, Marchioness of Exeter, on condition that he obtained a license to erect a 'hospital'. Six poor men or women were to pray for Gertude's soul and were supported by rents of £4-13-4d out of the manor of Canford. The License allowed for 'a fit person to be governor or master of the said hospital'.

From the few records available the Courtney almshouses are not referred to as a hospital, just houses to accommodate deserving poor residents of Wimborne. If a rate-funded poor house was actually built during the reign of Queen Elizabeth it does not seem to have been operational for very long.

1668 The Church of Wimborne Minster held the title deeds to a tenement in 'Cookrow' with an adjoining shop purchased in exchange for a workhouse with adjoining backside³.

1669 Wimborne Town brass halfpenny token shows 'For the use of the poore of Wimborne 1669 on one side and two laundry maids on the reverse. Was this a reference to work done by those at the Poor House? Although issued by the parish vestry it may not actually have benefited the poor. Wimborne was the only town to issue a half-penny token⁴ and this is in the collection at the Priest's House Museum, Wimborne.



Drawn by Teresa Hall
The Wimborne Trade Tokens 1657-1670 by Philip Coles

When the chained library in Wimborne Minster was 'modernised' in Victorian times it was rumoured that the original chains for the books had been made by the children in the workhouse. These links however have little resemblance to the fine work done in 1804.

In **1695** there was a very rudimentary poor-house but no records mention what work was done unless the pictured laundry maids are an indication.

1697 Documents at the Priests House Museum in Wimborne include an Assignment by Richard Hurst, a mason of Wimborne Minster, to the Overseers, of a lease of a cottage with a moiety of a pond or 'watery place' and ground lately enclosed lying near Walford Bridge and an adjoining garden plot. This may be the site of the original Poor House, possibly on Crooked Borough which later became known as East Borough, the watery place referring to the banks of the river Allen.

1700 If a baby was due in the 'workhouse' a midwife attended and was paid by the overseers. Children were apprenticed out as soon as possible, some as young as seven years old. They were clothed for their new circumstances by the Parish.

³ PE/WM CCW 4/1

⁴ Held by Priest's House, the Museum of East Dorset



Payments were made by the Wimborne Overseers of Poor for the making of Paupers' badges which depicted 'W' followed by 'P'. These red or blue badges were to be attached to clothing on the right shoulder. These were considered a weapon of deterrence.

1703 Churchwarden's accounts mention petticoats and waistcoats for children going as apprentices. Some embraced new opportunities in Newfoundland. 12/- was spent kitting out one boy. Orphans were also cared for at parish expense, but unmarried mothers were treated more harshly, being required to name the putative father so that the Parish could claim reimbursement and maintenance for the mother and child.

1714 Henry, younger brother of Ralph Bankes, MP for Corfe for 47 years, an official of the Royal Peculiar for 30 years was also involved with the workhouse in 1772. Later, George IV apparently offered him a peerage but he turned it down to remain in the House of Commons.

Great efforts were made to ensure that people who settled in the Parish of Wimborne Minster would not become a liability of the Parish. On 21st March 1714 A complaint was made that Joane, the wife of John Waite, Gent has arrived, intending to settle in the parish of Wimborne Minster. The crux of the complaint seems to centre on the fact that she already had many children. Elizabeth, Peter-Quynell, Melior Joana, Margaret, Magdalen Margaret, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew Joshue Athanasius and James Francis Athanasius her children plus John Gage Esq., an idiot and John Willy their servant. The Justices, Mr A Sturt and Mr William Fitch, discovered that John Waite, her husband was last legally settled in the parish of Compton in the County of Surrey and they decided that they should all be removed to this parish.⁵

1723 Test Act – This permitted a parish to construct and operate a workhouse and for outdoor relief to be refused to those unwilling to enter it⁶.

1750 Vestry report – first mention of a 'modern' workhouse in Wimborne. Henry Fitch and John Bankes signed most documents. The document is in a bundle covering Vestry business at the Minster between 1745 and 1814 which is now at the Dorset History Centre. The document of this date concerns the 'erection of a workhouse'.

⁵ Certificate of Re-Settlement 21/3/1714

⁶ Minster churchwardens accounts

It was decided to build accommodation for the poor (Workhouse) in Wimborne⁷ on a plot of land costing £160 belonging to Elizabeth Raven. The garden ran down to the River Allen.⁸ A committee was formed – John Bankes of Kingston Lacy, Henry Fitch of High Hall,(who owned the manor of Barnsley 3 m North of Wimborne) Nicholas Russell, Richard Wright, Christopher King, David Lambert, Thomas Oakley, John Fryer, Leonard Martin, Martin Tory, William Bath, and Matthew Raindle. They were all landowners, wealthy traders or farmers. The idea was that it would be self- supporting. Sales of manufactured goods would meet expenditure. An overseer or master was to be well skilled in the woollen industry and also linen weaving as well as being sufficiently literate to keep accounts. Later the inmates, particularly the children, were employed making watch chains and preparing silk for a Sherborne mill company. There is no mention of the cost of transporting the children. It is possible that the materials were delivered to Wimborne and that the work was done there and the finished items collected. William Nothoor was the first master at a salary of £14. A doctor was appointed to look after the poor.

1753 Adjoining the workhouse there was a small inn, the Dolphin, which provided inmates with the allowance of beer.

1760 Wimborne churchwardens commissioned a Work House to be built in East Borough at a cost of £1336 in 1750. The funds were raised by issue of bonds @ 5% on the personal security of the parish officers. A Committee was formed consisting of John Bankes, Rev. Fitch and Mr William Reeks, the tanner. Richard Oakley, the Vestry clerk to be the book keeper at £5 p.a. Richard Ordrance, appointed Master of the workhouse at a salary of £14 a year. His wife may have been the 'Mistress'.

The Overseer of the Poor was John Biles who was also a Churchwarden and James Hanham and Mr E Okeden were the Justices who examined claimants to Parish Relief.

⁷ SDN&Q March 1991 vol XXXIII

⁸ Dorset History Centre P204/VE1



The workhouse on East Borough, Wimborne
 Courtesy of the Priest's House Museum Collections Trust

1761 The Wimborne Workhouse was insured with Sun Fire Office for £800. The mark was placed prominently above the door so that in the event of a fire the fire engine crew would know that their costs would be reimbursed by the insurers.



Front door of Wimborne Workhouse
 Courtesy of the Priest's House Museum Collections Trust

The expenditure for the first two months was £267-8-6d, half being spent on maintenance and the purchase of food including wheat, barley, bacon and pork, cheese and beer, milk and butter. Clothes, shoes, books, seeds, books, candles and sadly, coffins. Seeds were also purchased so presumably it was intended to grow

vegetables to contribute to the workhouse meals.⁹

1762 The cost of shaving and barbering is noted in the accounts.¹⁰

1763 A new door for the workhouse was made by 'Robert' and cost £1-13-5d. (Now in the garden at the Priests house museum.) It was made of thick oak and studded with hand-made nails.¹¹



The workhouse door preserved at The Priest's House Museum, Wimborne.

When Thomas Leg was examined before two Justices of the Peace, W Hanham and J Hanham, to establish his right to stay in Wimborne, they were given details of his illegitimacy, his ten year apprenticeship as a planter in Newfoundland, service under a Frenchman over there and his escape on board HMS Arundel which was returning to England. This information was required in order to establish that as he was now employed in the Merchant Navy, he would not be requiring assistance, at the expense of the Parish, for himself or his wife Mary. The affidavit was duly signed by the JPs after Thomas Leg had made his mark.

1765 Accounts for the Overseers of Poor at Wimborne mention Wm White took Woodrow's and Harvey's boys apprentice to Newfoundland for £3-3-0d.

1766 Workhouse in East Borough cost for £1336. It had 18 rooms. Whether this is an entirely new building is not clear. It may be the cost of alterations and remodeling of the original building constructed in 1750

At this time in the mid eighteenth century a family with too many children to feed on the wages brought in by the father and older siblings were able to approach the Board of Overseers and ask for one or two children to be taken

⁹ Kathryn Hallett – Poor Relief and the Workhouse paper

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Churchwarden accounts

into the facility and brought up there rather than suffering a worse fate in their present circumstances.

1770 The chimneys needed sweeping at a cost of 2/- and a coffin and burial fees paid for an inmate – 9/1d.¹²

1782 The second Act dealing with finding work for the able bodied poor and indigent was passed. Only the sick and elderly were to be permitted to enter the workhouse. Both acts were intended to be benevolent and compassionate – relief to be paid for work spared a man's pride and the poor house was a hospital of sorts.¹³

1784 Poor Law – The Workhouse committee of Wimborne formed in 1750 and enlarged ten years later, contracted the care of the inmates out – 1/9d for each inmate every week for a year. The applicant, Richard Mitchell took up the post of Overseer – he had to provide the inmates with food, drink, clothing etc. Obviously he intended to make a profit out of his investment and the system was widely abused. Ten years later the Matron received an additional 2 Guineas over her salary and in 1797 another 2gn bonus. The workhouse in East Borough, was on the site of what is now Allen Court. The formidable iron studded door and lamp above must have been intimidating. The site adjoined the garden of Allendale House, built in 1823 which used to belong to the Castleman family. Apparently the outdoor toilets caused sufficient smell to trouble the owners of the privately owned house that they were moved so that the discharge went directly into the River Allen! Obviously no connection between drinking water downstream of such outflows and the prevalence of typhoid had not been made at this time. The town brewery also used water from the river Allen downstream of the workhouse!

The Poor Law act did not only deal with the town's unfortunates, it demanded that rates were paid towards the upkeep of country-wide utilities – prisons, bridges, asylums, infirmaries etc. Overseers or Guardians had a great deal to do and sometimes they became unpopular, despite the fact that they were unpaid. One or two abused the position. See 1818.

1788 The accounts of the Overseers of the Poor of Wimborne mention sending two apprentice boys out to Newfoundland at a cost of £6-6-0d, double the cost of doing so in 1765.

1797 Sir F. M. Eden visited Dorset for his survey into the State of the Poor. He found a shocking state of affairs. Blandford farm wages were only 6/- or 7/- per week with 36 inmates in the workhouse and 100 receiving parish relief, mostly due to the high price of provisions and low wages.

Where possible youths were apprenticed to merchants or traders. In February

1800 George Warren was apprenticed to Phillip Ahier, Gentleman of Jersey. When George became 21 and released from his term he was to be provided

¹² Kathryn Hallett – Poor Relief and the Workhouse

¹³ Knatchbull's Act: Gilbert's Act

with a suit and his passage home. On the same day, 5th February, 14 year old Joseph Hyde was apprenticed to John Winter, a merchant of Jersey under the same terms as was 14 year old Branson apprenticed to Phillip Loys, another merchant from Jersey. Later that year on November 3rd 16 year old George Reid was apprenticed to James Gerrard of Lymington, a chair maker.

1802 At Wimborne Poor House spruce beer was served instead of small beer made from grain. Part of the recipe was treacle and essence of spruce. Potatoes were now used instead of bread and cheese, and for breakfast, the milk broth was to be thickened with rice instead of bread.

1803 On April 11 Charles Saint was apprenticed to Thomas Bass of Bonavista in Newfoundland to dwell and serve with him until he reached the age of twenty-one. As an apprentice he was to serve in all lawful business according to his wit, power and ability, honestly, orderly and obediently to behave himself towards his master.

Thomas Bass had to promise to teach, instruct, or cause him to be instructed in the art of the Newfoundland fishery and at the end of the term give him £5, a suit of clothes and pay his passage to England. He must allow the apprentice sufficient meat, drink, apparel, lodging, washing etc.

1804 Children were to have the 'privilege' of watch chain manufactory at 1/6d per week. The nearest manufacturer of fusee and watch chains was Robert Harvey Cox, a Wimborne man who had trained in London, settled in Christchurch next door to the Ship Inn. He also used children from the Christchurch Poor House which is now the Red House Museum. Profit from the women and children in the workhouse who made watch chains amounted to £99-14-7d this year. Three years later it had risen to £310-12-12d but was reduced to £142.0.6d in 1808.¹⁴ The children worked by candlelight.

Initially run by the Vestry elected annually by the Overseers the policy was now to make the largest profit possible from the labour of paupers. Men's work produced £60-£100 pa while the children and aged had mostly been employed making watch chains. There had been a fusee chain factory at Christchurch since 1897. It is recorded that women and children in the factory rivetted the tiny links although the three layers of links each with two rivets make a chain no larger than finest silk. Over 20 links to the inch and all this without the use of a magnifying glass!

1808 Paupers from the Poor House were rented out to farms from Easter time. The Guardians ordered that bread for the workhouse was to be of 'good sound wheat'.

1810 Meals served on Sunday 4th September this year were as follows:-
Breakfast – milk Broth: Dinner – 5oz mutton or beef with potatoes or vegetables and for supper a bowl of broth.¹⁵ It is thought that the lack of green

¹⁴ The Christchurch Fusee Chain Gang by Sue Newman

¹⁵ Kathryn Hallett – Poor Relief and the Workhouse

vegetables contributed to the poor health of many of the inmates. The cook, Mr Ball, made a note that tea was served to the sick. He was also instructed to purchase cheese for Saturday evenings instead of broth. The cost amounting to £17.¹⁶

1811 Accounts of the Overseers of Poor at Wimborne mention paying an ‘allowance to Mr. Butt for fitting out two parish boys to Newfoundland £4-4-0d.’ There would have been no discussion with the parents and even if they knew in advance it was likely that they were persuaded that this was an opportunity the boy to live a different life, a chance to learn a trade and better himself.

1812 William Thorn, 45, a lunatic, broke out of workhouse. When caught he may have been sent to a more secure asylum.

1813 Lord Ashley, later the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury of Wimborne St Giles, witnessed a pauper’s funeral. The sight of a shroud-wrapped child being carried on a plank by drunken men with no mourners affected him so greatly that he resolved to bring their plight to the attention of the government.

In order to continue keeping the Poor Rates as low as possible many children were apprenticed to local traders and occasionally further afield. An indenture set out the terms of such an agreement:

THIS INDENTURE made the Nineteenth Day of February in the Fifty third year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord George III by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, and in the year of our Lord, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirteen WITNESSETH That James Sergeant & William Hart Churchwardens of the Parish Church of Wimborne Minster in the County of Dorset And William Pitt Butt, William Daniel Goodewe, James Perinou, and William Pitt Overseers of the Poor of the said Parish of Wimborne Minster by and with the Consent of his Majesties Justices of the Peace for the said Count – whose names are hereunto subscribed have put and placed, and by their Presents do put and place Richard Dibben aged 15 yrs or thereabouts a poor child of the said Parish of Wimborne Minster Apprentice to John Hardiman of Clark Street in the Parish of Saint James, Clerkenwell, Middlesex, Gold Seal and Watch Chain Maker with him to dwell and serve from the Day of the Date of these Presents, until the said Apprentice shall accomplish his full age of Twentyone years according the Statute in that Case made and Provided. During all which Term, the said apprentice his said Master faithfully shall serve, in all the lawful Businesses according to his Power, Wit and Ability and honestly, orderly and obediently in all Things demean, and behave himself towards his said Master and all his during the said Term. And the said John Hardiman – for himself, his executors and Administrators, doth Covenant and Grant to and with the said Churchwardens and Overseers, and every of them, their and every of their Executors

¹⁶ Ibid

and Administrators and their every of their Successors for the Time being, By there (sic) Presents, That he the said John Hardiman – the said Apprentice in the Trade Ordained Business of a Gold Seal and Watch Chain Maker shall and will Teach and Instruct, or cause to be taught and instructed in the best Way and Manner that he can AND shall and will, during the term aforesaid find, provide and allow unto the said Apprentice meet, competent and Sufficient Meat, Drink and Apparel, Lodging, Washing, and all other Things necessary and fit for an Apprentice; PROVIDED ALWAYS, that the last mentioned Covenant on the said John Hardiman – his Executors and Administrators, to be done and performed shall continue and be in force for no longer Time than Three Calendar Months next after the death of he said John Hardiman – in case the said John Hardiman – shall happen to die during the continuance of such Apprenticeship, according to the provision of an Act passed in the Thirty Second Year of the Reign of King George the Third, Intitled, “An Act for the regulation of Parish Apprentices” AND ALSO shall and will to provide for the said Apprentice, that he be not in any Way a Charge to the said Parish of Wimborne Minster or Parishioners of the same; but of and from all Charge shall and will save the said Parish of Wimborne Minster harmless, and indemnified during the said Term.”¹⁷

Being apprenticed to a skilled trade was much better than being trained as something like a chimney sweep or wood burner. On 2nd April Ann Carly aged only nine was hired out to William Bright of Tollard Farnham although his trade is not known.

1815 A dining room was required and built but it would appear that the cost later forced the Overseers to try and sell the entire workhouse to pay off the debts. In March 1816 the building would have to be auctioned unless a mortgage could be obtained to offset the £1310 required. They managed to raise £910 by selling debentures.

1817 Mr John Gouger wanted to set up a silk winding business using the children and other persons in Wimborne Workhouse as labour for his Sherborne based business. According to a Vestry meeting Mr Gouger to ‘find gratis the machinery necessary for carrying on the concern.’¹⁸ As part of the scheme the Parish authorities were to employ a woman for 8/- per week to teach the children how to unwind the cocoons. These may have been imported unless he owned the mulberry trees himself. The business must have thrived because three years later a Mr. Thomas Wren from London offered to take on the concern but for a much longer term as a minimum tenure The children, between 6 and 12 years old would earn between 1/6d – 4/- plus overtime if they worked more than twelve hours. This involves unravelling the thread

¹⁷ Village Voices by John Day

¹⁸ Sir Kaye le Fleming Notes file 37 PHM

from the cocoons which were soaked in boiling water. The fine filament was wound onto spools for use in weaving the costly material.

This appears to have been an alternative to the children working for a watch-chain manufacturer which required candle light to be directed onto the tiny metal links by a reflector and their eyesight quickly deteriorated.

1818 Stephen Wareham was apprenticed to John Jenkins on 5th December. Stephen was only ten years old. John Jenkins was a chimney sweep. His agreement required him to be washed clean once a week! Allowed to attend church regularly and wear the right clothing for his work. It sets out his working hours and forbids the Master from sending the boy up a chimney if a fire be set in the hearth. The law forbade the latter which one would think was an obvious precaution. The fact that it is mentioned indicates that sweeps were sometimes forced to clean a flue above the rising heat and gases of a fire.¹⁹

1819 The master of the Workhouse was Jasper Ball²⁰ and the Wimborne Overseer of the Poor was Mr. Bartlett.

1820 The Wimborne & Cranborne Union workhouse were charged by the Isle of Wight Guardians of the Poor for Widow Jackson. Wimborne apparently owed £5-0-18d. She then sent a hand written note saying that she had not received money for two weeks and that her children were ill. £5 was sent after some delay. Others applied for relief to be paid by Wimborne Overseers or they would risk being returned to the Parish and lost their job just because they were temporarily sick.²¹

Outdoor relief was paid at 2/- per week plus 6d for fuel or in cases of illness. An additional 3/- could be given if the breadwinner was unemployed or 4/- if both parents were out of work.

1824 Poor House regime in Wimborne dictated that children, especially girls, would work from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. in summertime and 8 a.m. 'til dark in wintertime. ½ hour was allowed for breakfast and 1 hour for dinner. The children were under the age of 10 years old. 1/6d was given to parish funds each week for each child employed.

1826 There were 105 inmates in the workhouse in Wimborne on 24th April this year.

1829 Overseers of the Poor in Wimborne had to find twenty acres of land for the inmates of the Poor House to farm. Adult males who applied for relief were sent to mend roads but this practice was short lived. Instead men were 'rented' to farmers for 6/- per week.

Men were employed for 8d a day and 4d for a woman. They were hired out to work in the gravel pits in Colehill, White Sheet, Pamphill and Row, or sent to dig potatoes or do building work.

¹⁹ Minutes of the Overseers of the Poor and Village Voices by John Day

²⁰ Will D/TCW/T134

²¹ Priest's House Museum workhouse file

1831 Population of Dorset now 159,252: 56,736 males, and 82,716 females. The population of Wimborne parish was 14,211 and there were three workhouses in the area – Wimborne, Cranborne and Hampreston. Those in the two latter villages closed in 1836 and the poor taken to the remaining Union workhouse in Wimborne.²²

1832 The small Hampreston workhouse which used to be rented to Churchwardens for £20 per year until 1839, dealt with the poor from its own parish.

Wimborne Vestry accounts noted possible prevention of 'Spasmodic cholera' and Wimborne Poorhouse accounts mention 'Paid Mr Cave (of Poole) for Assisting the Parish surgeon extracting a halfpenny from the throat of Mr. Munn's child - £1 -1-0d.

Wimborne Minster Vestry Poorhouse Committee met to consider applications to go to work. Would the applicant leave the poorhouse or just go to work and pay his wages to the Parish in return for his accommodation? James Exton was sent to work in a gravel pit but no details as to pay is given.

The new Poor Law reduced the number of Union Workhouses so that an inmate could be some distance from his former home. The 'Union' refers to several parishes. Life inside was deliberately made very unpleasant so that only the most desperate would attempt to enter. The diet and the obligatory work were designed to encourage people to help themselves if at all possible.

1834 Poor Law Act – Conditions were lawfully deliberately made worse than those in the community to deter residents from entering. Wimborne Workhouse now served a huge area of several parishes and it was overcrowded, disease ridden and had a pretty brutal regime for the inmates. Only 14 residents are recorded in April this year. Men, women and children were now separated. A uniform was to be worn. The women had to wear blue or brown calico dresses and the men were provided with suits. No beards were allowed and hair cutting was regularly noted in the accounts. They were obliged to pick apart old ropes to make oakum, the subsequent fibres used to caulk seams of wooden boats. Initially 4lb a day from each resident but this was increased to 6lb a day in year 1870 except for those who were sick or under age. The diet was appalling – beer discontinued in 1841 and less breakfast. Meat once a week and potatoes were the only vegetable hence rickets and scurvy rife. 6lb of bread per week each. The report had been drawn up by a Royal Commission who were biased wanting to cut relief. They pointed out that the old poor house was “as a miserable abode occupied rent free by 3 or 4 dissolute families mutually corrupting each other.”

The Commissioners were later accused of being heartless tyrants. A Committee of the Governors of Wimborne Minster issued a resolution to pay outdoor paupers half in money and half in bread. Technically the support of

²² Clegg – History of Wimborne

people in the community had been disallowed by the Act but the Wimborne Guardians continued this practice.

The Wimborne & Cranborne Union was one of 12 in Dorset and covered 24 parishes:- Chalbury, Chettle, Corfe Mullen, Cranborne, Edmondsham, Hinton Martell, Hinton Parva, Horton, Long Crichel, Moor Crichel, Pentridge, Shapwick, 6d Handley, Sturminster Marshall, West Parley, East Woodyates, West Woodyates, Wimborne, Wimborne St Giles, Witchampton and Woodlands. The area was very rural and covered many large estates including that of Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister. There were continued outbreaks of small-pox, cholera, typhoid and scurvy, the latter the result of the poor diet and lack of vitamins. As the money to pay for food and accommodation of workhouse inmates was raised by rating the parishioners, the lowest sum that could be economically viable was charged. Even so, there was a perception that vagrants, unmarried mothers and more or less anyone else who had been forced to enter the workhouse was an idle criminal and to be scorned by the upright, working and law abiding population of Wimborne.

Those who were merely destitute but basically fit lived alongside those who were clearly suffering from dementia or even mental instability. Only the worst cases of the latter were actually removed to asylums, still paid for by the Parish.

After the Poor Law amendment Act, workhouses were built to specific designs. Aged and infirm men were separated from able bodied men over 13. Boys 7-13 lived apart. Aged and infirm women were apart from able bodied women aged over 16 while 7-16 year old girls were separated from younger siblings. Children and babies up to the age of 7 were apart from their parents. Presumably mothers were allowed to feed their babies when necessary although depictions of workhouse life in literature of this period mention a room full of screaming babies overseen by one deaf, elderly woman. Separating married couples like this was thought to be un-Christian but also a deterrent. No alcohol and no presents of food were allowed. Even the sick did not receive special food. The timetable was set out by a central authority. Rise at 5 in summer, at 7 in the winter. Work for 10 hours in summer and 9 in the winter. All three meals were taken in silence. 1 free hour between 7 and 8 pm then bed. There was no provision for time outside in fresh air and scant education for children who rarely saw their parents. Only the truly desperate accepted in-relief. The principal object of the Act was to reduce those in the workhouse to a level lower than the worst paid labourers, a tenet the Wimborne Guardians took to heart with enthusiasm.

In September Rev. James Hanham reported that the Master of the workhouse was a drunkard. He was absent between 6 and 8 pm and then again later in the evening returning at midnight intoxicated. These facts were confirmed by many of the inmates. As a result there was little discipline, the boys disorderly

and riotous. Mr George Edwards was replaced the following year by Thomas Doweling at a salary of £80.

1835 As a result of the new workhouse rules the number of claimants dropped dramatically. The relief given by the parish officers were also lower but at the same time the harvests were good and farmers employed more people.

Areas of Great Britain, particularly northern counties, where more labour was required, offered to re-locate whole families to their area. Only one Dorset family is listed as having taken up this offer.

Recorded in the Overseers notes under Discipline – A bottle of rum brought into the workhouse in a basket for the use of 85yr old Betty B. be thrown into the ‘kennel’ or rubbish dump and the woman be ‘admonished upon the vice of drunk and of breaking the rules of the House’.

1836 Over the next couple of years £1555 was spent on alterations and improvements to Wimborne workhouse – building a school room, a chapel and creating accommodation for 180 inmates in three wards. These were contained in a long two storey brick building adjoining East Borough. Surprisingly delicate brickwork and large sash windows were installed together with a gas lamp over the arched doorway with its studded door. 60ft long dormitories were created on the second floor. A separate infirmary was constructed in the garden. This was for those who became ill after their arrival not for sick arrivals! Three separate areas are designated for ‘Old and Infirm’, ‘Able Bodied’ women and ‘Able Bodied’ men.

Also shown on the plan is a wash house and laundry. As with the half-penny token made in 1669 with two laundry-maids on the obverse, there is no mention of any of the townspeople sending laundry to the workhouse on a commercial basis in the Guardian’s Accounts. It is therefore presumed that female inmates only did the in-house laundry.

The Overseers received a demand in December that they reimburse the parish of Sturminster Marshall for the maintenance of a bastard child at the rate of 1/3d per week until it reached the age of seven. Was it thought that this youngster could then work for its living and no longer be a drain on parish resources?

Throughout the mid 19thC inmates picked oakum. The old ropes obtained from Naval dockyards and ships were cut into short lengths and then unpicked to release the fibres from the tar with which hawsers were often coated. It made the fingers very sore.

Few applications for assistance and clothes to enable inmates to leave and seek work were successful. The Board of Guardians, made up of local worthies, were unpaid. One of the most influential was Rev. Carr John Glyn, rector of Witchampton for nearly 60 years.

Everything was put out to competitive tender, food carefully measured and a prescribed uniform. 6/6d spent on trousers and jacket for young boys, 24/- for a man's suit. No alcohol was allowed. Betty Barnes, an elderly pauper had been told she could not have any, but Rev James Hanham (of Deans Court) and Mr Edward Greathed (of Uddens House) managed to get that rule relaxed so that anyone over 60 could in future have Table Beer. The workhouse was rented from the parish as a Union workhouse for £50 per year. At the first meeting possibly under the Chairman Henry Bartlett a summary of the expenses for 1832-35 was submitted to the Guardians. The cost of poor relief to the parish of Wimborne was £2191 i.e. Between 10d and 11d per head of population. Precepts were levied by the Wimborne overseers to meet the necessary expenses. A schoolmistress Jane Matthews was appointed at 6d per week.²³

Out-relief could be withdrawn if the recipient was found intoxicated. In May, J.C. of Wimborne had his benefit discontinued for this reason.

In November Mr. W Burt was requested to procure and send to the Workhouse 5 cwt of bones. These were for crushing and use as fertilizer on the fields.²⁴

1837 Mr. George Augustus Place tendered for the post of Medical Officer for District One in the Wimborne & Cranborne Union workhouse at a salary of £45 per year. He was born in Hampreston, the son of the Rector and his wife Margaret, nee Roebuck.

When the Board were told that James C of Dogdean was still ill and had consulted another Medical Gentleman other than the one employed by the Workhouse all relief to him was suspended. There is no evidence that this was actually the case and there was no opportunity for the patient to put forward any explanation or even refute the accusation.²⁵

The Workhouse rules emphasised the shame of unmarried mothers forcing them to wear coarse grey dresses and mob caps.

The Board of Guardians of the Wimborne workhouse, acting on their medical officer's advice, reduced the number of meat dinners during the week to one instead of three – that being deemed sufficient for able-bodied male inmates. Many inmates were employed crushing bones from the slaughter house although this is also mentioned as a punishment. This was done in mortars and the resultant pieces had to be fine enough to be put on fields. In the North implementation of the stricter relief rules provoked riots and the troops had to be called out. A movement called the Chartists was created to fight the Poor Law which now only gave relief in return for work but in Dorset their activities seem to have been confined to raising agricultural wages.. For the last couple of years orphans had been fostered out with an allowance and when parish officers were compassionate, the elderly poor were not disturbed too much.

²³ Clegg – History of Wimborne and Priest's House Museum files

²⁴ Notes of Dr Kaye le Fleming PHM file

²⁵ Notes of Dr Kaye le Fleming PHM file

Older children were apprenticed and often exploited in factories. A third of these were under 16.

The Master was ordered to provide a weekly report to the Visiting Committee of the offences and punishments which had been meted out to inmates. Details of all disorderly conduct of the Paupers, occasions when swearing was heard and fighting amongst themselves²⁶ were recorded. Punishment could also include being deprived of the meagre quantity of food now served.²⁷ In June one lady, Elizabeth N, was to be taken before a magistrate for refusing to work as directed by the Master.

Mr Burt was asked to let the Workhouse have as much hemp as he could spare and then to purchase one ton of fine oakum for the Workhouse from Portsmouth dockyard. One payment to him was for £4-18-0d to be entered in the Labour section of the Overseers Accounts.

There were numerous requests for bedding and clothing to be provided for poor people during illness or childbirth. Women leaving the workhouse were given a petticoat and a pair of stockings. Any other clothes were probably provided from charitable gifts provided by parish households.

1838 Further ignominy for unmarried mothers in the Poor House was announced. For a first offence just a mob cap was worn but a girl whose morals were beyond the pale signified by having more than one illegitimate child, had to wear a yellow dress and cap so that all could see her shame.

This year a Man, wife and child were admitted to the Poor House in Wimborne. The boy had smallpox but because of the delay in diagnosis, the disease spread. Thirteen people caught it. They were kept in one room measuring 18'6" x 12'6" using five beds. This was the only attempt to isolate them from the 190 inmates of the workhouse.

The salary of Mr Place, medical officer for the Wimborne & Cranborne Union workhouse was raised to £46 per year (+ £1) then he resigned on 6th August. This was shortly after all three district's medical officers had met in the house of Mary Hapgood on 21st May. She was a sick pauper of the parish. Mr Rowe, Mr Jones and Mr Place attended the meeting.

All three medical officers were required to attend a board meeting at the workhouse on 6th August. Apparently Mr Place had failed to appoint a medic to be his locum in his absence. Mr Jones and son took over his duties on the same terms. A new centre block including a chapel was now completed at a cost of £814-11-0d.²⁸

Aged people requiring outdoor Poor Relief were allowed 2/6d per week and a loaf of bread providing they had no other income. One married couple had their present allowance of 4/6d per week raised to 5/- so that they were not

²⁶ Dr Kaye le Fleming Notes PHM file

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Clegg – History of Wimborne

disadvantaged due to being married. The Guardians were subject to instructions and supervision of Poor Law Board.²⁹

1839 A poster was put up warning that there was Smallpox in the Workhouse. The Guardians called a meeting in the Club Room on West Borough in Wimborne, Friday January 11th to organise preventive steps to guard against its spread.

Criticism of the situation was published in The Times regarding the outbreak of smallpox in the workhouse at Wimborne and also that young girls were 'consorting' with pregnant women and prostitutes. It suggested that the morals of the youngsters were at risk. The Guardians were furious that Mr. George Place, surgeon of Wimborne, had contacted the national paper.

The Assistant Poor Law Commissioner, Colonel a Court,³⁰ inspected Wimborne workhouse early this year. The 'small room' had five beds in it. A single for one woman, 1 double held three sisters aged 17, 9 and six; 1 double for a widow and two children of three years old and six months; 1 double for three girls of 17, 14, and 11; 1 double for 3 children of 13, 10 and 8. He said the situation was objectionable but had not promoted the spread of sickness! The schoolroom had to be converted to house the thirteen smallpox patients, with five of the mothers and three additional 'nurses' to care for them. Only four of the girls in the 'small room' had been infected. At this date there were 195 people in the workhouse although it could accommodate a maximum of 230.

Having created a furore by writing anonymously to the Times, George Place, the doctor, attended the inspection and took his legal advisor, Edward Castleman, with him to meetings on 29th January and 21st February at the workhouse. Two enquiries had been held regarding overcrowding at the Wimborne & Cranborne Union workhouse. The deplorable conditions being reported in The Times. Not satisfied with the reports of the 'enquiry' Place published an 'address to the Inhabitants of the Wimborne & Cranborne Union workhouse on 5th March. He maintained that Smallpox was spread by not removing an infected child in a ward of 24 people shared 8 beds and there were no qualified nurses. A letter from Dr John Carnegie MD – Extra Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians London, refuted the above accusations. Doctor George Place MD, did call daily, the mother and child were isolated, and others vaccinated.

Funerals paid for by the parish were to include a coffin with two handles and two letters on top. Any tradesman putting extras on them will forfeit his contract with the Union. The infirmary windows were now to be 'latticed' to prevent patients from throwing items outside. Presumably this was a form of bars.

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Kathryn Hallett – Poor Relief and the Workhouse

All inmates of the Workhouse in Wimborne wore distinctive clothing. Mary A... left the workhouse without authorisation and was taken before magistrates charged with stealing her clothing. Two men, Thomas C and George B, able-bodied inmates, escaped by climbing the walls and went to the pub! They too were taken before magistrates. Some parents tried to leave the workhouse abandoning their children but many requests for boots or clothing to allow an inmate to leave the workhouse were refused. The more occupants the more profitable the workhouse became and the Guardians therefore only allowed those who had a real chance of finding useful work to quit.

In February however, the clerk was instructed to write to the Government Emigration Agent on behalf of several residents of Sturminster Marshall who were enquiring about free passage opportunities to New South Wales in Australia. The following month £5-11-9d was contributed towards the expense of buying clothes for three men going to Newfoundland to work.

In all 42,767 children under 16 were in 478 workhouses in England. Many were badly designed and overcrowded, the old parish workhouses being judged to be the worst.

Six months expenses at the Wimborne workhouse amounted to £1654, the Wimborne precept being £438.

1840 Mr. Castleman, who lived in the next door property, complained about the conduct of able bodied Ann H. The Board ordered her immediate discharge. She had no opportunity to speak in her defense and there was no check to see if the charge could be corroborated. Unless she could find work with bed and board she was likely to die in a ditch.

At the poor house the daily beer allowed to aged was stopped.

Three officers were employed at £80 per year to disburse Outdoor Relief payments. They dispensed £100 a week between them. The assessment for Poor Rate was levied on property and stock. The Court of Queen's Bench quashed existing rates on the Parish of Wimborne Minster because stock was not included and levied an increased amount of £2082. - see The Wimborne Story by G H Watson.

Apparently Castleman offered to buy the workhouse premises adjacent to his house for £2500 plus £100 to help towards relocation. A highly respected gentleman, it was known that he disliked being next door to this facility.

Charles Moor was employed as the Wimborne workhouse barber for £10 a year. Richard Mackerell undertook to make paupers coffins for 14/- for adults, 10/- for children between five and fourteen years old and 5/- for babies and small children.

Several applications for relief were received from men who had been hurt following accidents. With the main breadwinner unable to work whole families were threatened with starvation. The parish gave 8/- to one man who had six children, 5/- to another with two children and 3/- to a man whose wife was foreign, sick and struggling to cope with four children. To discourage the birth

of children, especially illegitimate ones, the Board admitted the husband who was unable to work to the workhouse. The wife and children then received 'out-relief', part in cash, (5/2 ½ d per week) and part in bread. Even those whose injuries had occurred at work were treated in this cavalier fashion.

People who turned down offers of employment because of the low wages were also dealt with severely, their refusal to work often causing the entire family to be denied parish relief.

1841 Wimborne workhouse records 70 men and 71 females. The oldest man being 85 yrs old and the oldest women 75. 29 boys and 29 girls. Two of the boys were 4 and 3 days old, as yet unbaptised. This comment was later struck from the record. Inmates were compelled to dress in workhouse clothes. If he left wearing them it was theft. If he discharged himself and did not find work he might not be re-admitted. Prayers were read morning and evening to women and girls after they were locked up in their wards. Men and boys were obliged to attend prayers. On Sundays there was Divine service – entry to the chapel was strictly regimented - women and girls first, then old men and boys, lastly able bodied men. Afterwards the men and boys were locked up in their workroom before the women were allowed to leave the chapel. Five men who willfully refused to attend Chapel found themselves in front of the Magistrates.³¹ The Clerk wrote to the Gaoler at Dorchester advising him to caution the five prisoners now in his custody for misconduct at the workhouse that on their discharge from gaol, they return to their families or risk being charged under the Vagrants Act.³²

The Guardians work was carried out by a clerk, Chaplain, the Master and Matron, the Relieving Officer and Medical Officers. (1865 Clerk paid £100; 1895 £120; two Relieving Officers £105 and £110, 4 medical officers £75-£95 and Chaplain £50)

In June it was agreed that every able bodied male pauper was to pick 4lbs of oakum every day.

Again this year cases requiring the Guardian's scrutiny were raised at the Committee. A man, Fred S... aged 41 suffering from indigestion applied for relief. His wife was 38 and had already had five children under the age of thirteen and therefore could not work. Relief was granted 5/6d for one week only. There was no order for him to be seen by a physician.

1842 An Inquisition was held at Wimborne Minster workhouse on 1st March. The Coroner was Thomas George Robson, gent and the body that of George Woodford who may have been an inmate. The verdict of 'accidentally run over by waggon' (sic) was delivered.³³

³¹ Dr Kaye le Fleming Notes PHM file Discipline

³² Ibid

³³ Dorset Post Morten Inquisitions

In February a letter was written to the Guardians of Poole Union to ask them to give relief to a Cranborne man, aged 67, who had managed to get himself taken on as an apprentice in their town!

A new school mistress was appointed for the workhouse @ £!5 p.a. plus workhouse rations.

Visitors were now allowed to see relatives and friends who were inmates. This relaxing of the previous rule forbidding anyone from entering the house except in an emergency was gratefully received. Many who were forced to enter the facility thought it was a life sentence.

In November Thomas M, a pauper inmate was brought before the Guardians and charged with misconduct, swearing and insulting the Master. He was to be punished by being placed in a separate room and provided with one meal of 1lb of cooked potato for 24 hrs. Another victim, a mother, received a similar punishment but presumably was allowed to feed her infant.

The workhouse took in expectant mothers and when they left to resume a normal working life, the child, usually illegitimate or as many in the town complained, a bastard, remained at the cost to the town. The Commissioners of the Poor Law received letters from Wimborne rate payers complaining and stating that in their opinion having a bastard should be deemed a criminal offence and the cost of raising such a child should not be at the expense of God-fearing people.³⁴

In October **1844** a widow in Cranborne who had been receiving relief for herself and three children had the benefit abruptly discontinued when it was discovered that she had now given birth to a bastard child. Judgement was harsh and some might say that the Guardians were unfeeling but they had only just been criticized for caring for a considerable number of such babies and children in the workhouse.

Elderly men were allowed out into the town between 10a.m. and 12 noon and again from 2pm to 5pm. They were not allowed to miss meals or prayers, forbidden to enter a public house and they had to submit to a search on their return. Later this same year the privilege was withdrawn from one man who broke the rules and in November it was withdrawn entirely on the orders of the Poor Law Commissioners.

The following letter was written by the Guardians:-

'March 1845

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in Parliament assembled:

The Humble Petition of the Guardians of the Wimborne and Cranborne Union in the County of Dorset.

Sheweth,

³⁴ Sir Kaye le Fleming notes PHM file

That your petitioners having given their best consideration to the Bill before your Honourable House for altering the Law of Settlement, beg to express their strong opinion that the substituting of Union for Parochial Settlement would be highly injurious to the interests of the Ratepayers as well as of the poor themselves. That your petitioners are strengthened in this opinion by the fact that few, if any, Guardians of Unions have availed themselves of 4 + 5 W + C.76 J33 enabling them with the approval of the Poor Law Commissioners, to unite for the purpose of Settlement. That while the Guardians of this Union are practically alive to all the evils of the present Law of Settlement and the hardships inflicted on the Labourer by his liability to removal, they are still of opinion that the present Law, with all its drawbacks, would be productive of far less evil to the Labouring Classes than the compulsory substitution of Settlement by Unions rather than by Parish, for among the inevitable results would be the destruction of that parochial system which is so interwoven with the feelings and the habits of the population, the deadening of local activity and energy, the diminution of a jealous vigilance over the expenditure and conduct of the District Officers, and more than all the loss to the great number of Labourers themselves of a direct and more immediate interest in their employment on the part of the Ratepayers who would then feel that as a wider range would be offered to the Applicant in his search for work, the claims on their assistance would be less personal and pressing. Your petitioners therefore believing that in time of great and general distress that the amount of employment for the industrious poor would be greatly diminished by the proposed measure and the mass of distribution fearfully increased, earnestly begs your Honourable House not to give your sanction to such parts of the Bill in question as relates to Settlement by Unions instead of Parishes.

And your Petitioners will every pray etc. etc. '

A grandfather, Mr Thomas L....., who was paying 2/- a week towards the care of his grand-children whose father had abandoned them, applied for a reduction. His application was considered and he was promptly ordered to pay 3/6d a week in future.

1847 Another outbreak of smallpox in the Workhouse where the 190 residents slept in the attic which had been designed for 40. There were now so few children in the workhouse that it was no longer necessary to employ a schoolteacher. 4 girls 2 – 7 yrs old, 11 aged 7 – 15. 6 boys aged 2 – 7; one boy aged 7 – 15.

The Board decided to allow the elderly to go into the town. Their uniform was marked with the badge of the Workhouse. Now combined as a Union workhouse it displayed both names in addition to a large letter 'P' on a red background.



Due to the failure of the potato crop this year some agricultural workers were struggling to provide for their families. George L from Sixpenny Handley was one such man. Aged 32, the same as his wife, he had 6 children under nine and while he was able bodied and in the employ of Mr Perks at 8/- a week, he also had to pay rent for his cottage. With the rising cost of provisions he was struggling to feed his family. The Board considered the case and agreed to allow him 3/4d for one week only.

Those on outdoor relief were now allowed a 4lb load of bread and regardless of its actual cost only deducted five pennies from their benefit payment.

1848 Under an Act passed this year the Lunacy Commissioners were empowered to inspect not only private and public madhouses but workhouses in which the insane were lodged. They visited the Workhouse in Wimborne where four lunatics were lodged.

1849 The Master of the Workhouse was to consult physicians as to the expediency of vegetables being supplied to inmates. Only potatoes were served and many cases of scurvy occurred.

Emma Hicks was appointed as schoolteacher at £15 p.a. She was to instruct the children in reading, writing and arithmetic plus the principles of Christian religion 'and shall impart such other instruction as shall fit them for service and train them to habits of usefulness, industry and virtue.' She had to take meals in her own room. The list of her responsibilities was considerable - take children out for 1hr of exercise per day and on Saturday between 2pm and 4pm: superintend the making and mending of the children's clothes; attend to the general cleanliness and good conduct of the children: see them go to bed and get up at the proper hours and shall assist the Master and Matron in maintaining due subordination in the Workhouse! Her salary was raised to £24 the following year.

An employee at Dorchester prison whose parish was Corfe Mullen was sent to the Wimborne & Cranborne Union for misconduct. In July the Board ordered the purchase of a cane to be kept in the schoolroom. Before it could be used they wanted the Chaplain to inspect it. Dr. Kaye le Fleming finds it odd that it was not inspected by the medical officer as it would inflict corporal punishment not a spiritual one.

1850 In April Uriah Amey, a single man, was granted money by the Wimborne & Cranborne Union so that he could buy boots and shirts so that he could leave the workhouse and find work. Many applied for boots, stockings etc. and were refused. Does this imply that inmates were barefoot?

The number of people applying for assistance to emigrate rose sharply. It would appear that no enquiries were made as to where young girls would be living and working when they left England. Their future welfare was totally in the lap of the gods.

1851 Census - Workhouse Wimborne

William Sutton, Headmaster (sic)
 Georgiana Ann Sutton, wife, Matron
 Elisabeth Picknell, niece 19
 Diana Clerk, Schoolmistress 23
 95 inmates.

There was now a lack of employment since pounding of the smelly bones had been stopped because of the offensive smell wafting across the town. More oakum was purchased at the request of the Visitors who were angered by apparently able bodied people sitting around idle. The poor diet, basically not far off starvation rations, gave the inmates little energy to spare.

1854 Wimborne & Cranborne Union Workhouse recorded expenses of £2871 for six months which gave rise to a precept of £870 on the Wimborne population.³⁵

1855 Albert Clarke and his wife Eliza were now Master and Mistress of the Union House (workhouse)

Mr. J W Warland offered in January, to supply a teacher of knitting for 6/- a week so that the children could knit gloves. Mr. Warland provided the materials and agreed to pay 5/- per dozen pairs made. The contract was cancelled in September so presumably the children were not able to make a profit for the workhouse.³⁶

1856 First burial in the cemetery in Wimborne. (parish of Pamphill) Walter Noah Cull who had been in the Union Workhouse died aged only two years old and was interred on 1st April. As was usual for inmates of such institutions, no headstone marks his grave.

1857 During the restoration of the Minster the ground outside was reduced in height disturbing many burials. Le Fleming noted that bones lay about before being collected up and may have being broken down by people in the workhouse even though the practice had ceased, before being spread on fields at Stapehill.

Inquest held in the boardroom/chapel of the Workhouse in Wimborne on December 23rd. It involved the sad case of an illegitimate boy of six who had

³⁵ Clegg History of Wimborne

³⁶ Board of Guardian Minute book under discipline

died hours after arriving with his mother. She had carried him for several days on her back before reaching the nunnery at Stapehill Abbey where they were given bread and rice. She then obviously took shelter in a wagon owned by Seth Seymour, a Poorhouse Guardian. He sent them to the Workhouse but the boy was very sick, starved and verminous. The cold winter weather caused the boy to suffer from exposure. The jury decided to give an explanation that the boy died from diarrhoea, accelerated by exposure, a Narrative Verdict. The mother was not charged with manslaughter.

A Chaplain and school mistress were appointed and Medical Officers for the four districts covered by the Wimborne & Cranborne Union were appointed. A morning service was held after which the men left and went to their workroom before the women left the service.

Major Portman and Mr. Baskett, a surgeon of Wimborne, were gently reminded of the correct procedure for admitting someone to the Union workhouse.³⁷ Perhaps they had directed people to seek help without giving them a formal letter of admittance and clearly setting out the reasons.

In December **1860** the clerk was asked to receive of Messrs Veal the rent of the Green Man public house belonging to Sarah H, late a lunatic, and pay her thereafter 5/- a week for her maintenance.

1861 Sophia Cross died of TB in the workhouse.

Joseph and Emmeline Clarke were appointed Governor and Mistress of the Wimborne & Cranborne Union workhouse. Two schoolmistresses were hired for 41 scholars together with a nurse. There were 25 men aged 28 – 86 and 53 females 17 boys. One 85 year old man admitted he had been a smuggler since he was a boy!

From October **1862** the Guardians wished to appoint Mr. George Baynton, Superintendent of Police to be the Assistant Relieving Officer for vagrants for the Wimborne and Cranborne Union. They had to get permission for this appointment from the Poor Law Board.

Christmas in the workhouse this year was reported in the Dorset County Chronicle. Benefactors were invited to Xmas dinner. The room was decorated with greenery. Beef, turkey and plum pudding was served together with beer. Small presents were given to the inmates. Tobacco for the men. (The Dorchester Union apparently had two festive dinners with another on St Thomas's Day provided by the Vicar.)

Some Unions doubled as asylums for the insane. The Commissioners in Lunacy inspected them. Out of 97 Wimborne Union inmates, fifteen were deemed to be lunatics.

1863 George Forward in the Wimborne workhouse had severe rickets so badly that he should have been in an orthopaedic hospital. There were several

³⁷ Sir Kaye le Flemings Notes – PHM file

babies – presumably from unmarried mothers in the town because inside the workhouse the sexes were segregated, even husbands and wives.

This measure sounds harsh but it was one method of discouraging couples from applying to enter and because there was no reliable contraception available, reduced the chance of the wife bearing a child which would be considered a further cost to the parish.

Vagrants were now arriving at the Workhouse filthy dirty. An additional tin bath was ordered so that new arrivals could be washed. At this time the one tin bath was used by all staff and inmates, some 200 persons!

A letter was received from the Visitors of the Forston asylum containing a cheque for £6 being the amount received from the War Office as pension money due to the late Robert D, a pauper lunatic who died there in 1848.

1864 Recorded in the Workhouse minutes:: Prison Dietaries – at the last weekly meeting of the Society of the Arts, Dr Edward Smith read a paper on the value of food to the working classes. Mr Chadwell in reference to Prison diet made a comparison between the results of the diet established in 60 gaols. In 20 where the diet was lowest, 188oz of solid food allowed – percentage of sickness was 3 deaths, i.e. 1 ½ per thousand. In 20 gaols where intermediary diet of 213oz of solid food was adopted sickness was 18%, deaths 3 per thousand. 20 gaols giving 288oz of solid food per week resulted in sickness of 23 ½ % and four deaths per thousand.

1865 According to J. G. Harrod's & Co Postal & Commercial Directory the workhouse was brick built and accommodate 250 persons although average occupation is 110 people.

1867 All able bodied men in Wimborne workhouse ordered to 'pick' 3lbs of oakum per day. Vagrants and old men had to do 1lb per day. Four boys were caught stealing money in the Workhouse. George Cobb; Henry Cox; George Sand; and Charles Wort. They were taken before the magistrates. They may have been whipped or even sent to a House of Correction. The punishment does not seem to be recorded.

In January the Master was asked to employ the able bodied male vagrants in breaking stones for one hour every morning. He now had to provide daily figures on the quantity of oakum picked by his charges. Even those who had only claimed one night's lodging and breakfast must pick a certain quantity before they could leave. In April the Board set out the quantities required from inmates: Old men 1lb, Able bodied men 3 lbs and vagrants 1.5lbs. If women were forced to do it the Board found they would be the only workhouse imposing such work on females. There is however a photograph of elderly women doing such work in 1906 but the location is not reported.³⁸

³⁸ National Archives collection

1868 The Workhouse in East Borough was enlarged and more ground bought to build an infirmary for thirty – cost £1587. (Clegg – History of Wimborne) Additional costs raised the amount to close to £2000.

The Guardians of the Workhouse received a letter from a clergyman about a woman requiring parish relief. The Clerk was directed to reply that it would be contrary to the Poor Law Board's orders to relieve her out of the Workhouse as she had an illegitimate child. Since 1838 it had been policy that women admitted pregnant or having a bastard child should wear a uniform dress and small plain mob cap. For a second offence a yellow serge dress and mob cap were obligatory. This was later changed to grey lindsey. There were few tied or agricultural worker houses available so that the able bodied could not take on local work. Neither could they marry hence many bastard children at this time. Guardians deemed paupers criminals.

The clerk wrote to the Sturminster Newton Union in reply to their letter about the condition of an orphan William G... The letter stated that he was in the last stages of consumption and the Guardians considered he should be allowed relief in money at the rate of 3/- per week together with the attendance of the Medical Officer. It was hoped they would agree to this. Dr. Kaye le Fleming adds that this is the first mention of tuberculosis recorded in the minutes despite the fact that the disease was prevalent at the time.

1870 Charles Parke was also Chairman of the Guardians of the Poor House. The Master was Mr Greaves Harvey and his wife, Martha was Matron. The overseers were Mr E T Budden for the Wimborne area, Mr T Lodder for Leigh, Mr S Johnson for Kingston Lacy and Mr T Munkton for Holt.

At the Wimborne & Cranborne Union workhouse all but small children were expected to pick oakum – unravel old ropes- which was hard on the hands. They were supposed to do 6lb per day. This was reduced to 5lbs three years later. A Poor diet led to rickets, scurvy, TB and pneumonia, diseases spreading in the over-crowded conditions frequently 14 to a room. Very few vegetables were served.³⁹

Vagrants risked begging as an alternative to the workhouse. Unemployment was rising so people 'tramped' to find work. Railways attracted casual workers. By now, a slightly more sympathetic attitude was developing among the Guardians of the Workhouse. One of the Guardians died and he was known to bully the paupers for sport. His death was not lamented.

1873 Also in June, on 18th, a Foresters' Fete was held after a service in the Minster. They dined under canvas on the cricket field with bands and the Minster bells ringing. The August issue of their newsletter showed a woodcut sketch of the 'old mens' ward at the Workhouse.

At the meeting of the Guardians in July the subject of the support of parents being kept at parish expense in the Workhouse was raised. They voted on the

³⁹ Jude James' book Wimborne Minster – The History of a Country Town has more details

question – Whether a son having a wage of 12/- a week and two children should be asked to contribute 6d a week towards the support of his own or his wife's parents? Fifteen of the Guardians thought this was a reasonable request but two voted against it. The second scenario involved a son earning 15/- per week in similar circumstances and the Guardians voted unanimously that requesting a contribution was totally reasonable. From now on though, all requests for long term in-house and out-relief were to be refused. This would inevitably lead to hardship as people tried to move to other areas where they might tenuously have a right to claim settlement.

1876 A skilled nurse was now employed in the Workhouse.

The Board felt their relaxed attitudes must harden. They asked the Clerk to enquire whether the able bodied poor receiving benefits should be put to work breaking granite. This was used to repair the town roads.

The following year the Relieving Officers were ordered to make a list of all the paupers receiving out-relief from each individual parish which was then to be nailed to the relevant church door every six months. Was this an attempt to name and shame those who had fallen on hard times?

1878 Guardians of the Wimborne & Cranborne Union Workhouse made enquiries about a more efficient 'stone pounding box and bar' to replace the existing pestle and mortar system of crushing bones. They had been to see one at the Ringwood Union workhouse.

Water closets at the Workhouse were converted to earth closets. Previously the toilets had discharged into river Allen.

1879 Children under twelve were to be tried by magistrates in the town rather than being sent to the Assizes with a judge and jury.

Nine ladies formed a visiting committee to the Workhouse. At the Xmas Dinner inmates had 1lb of meat and a substantial amount of pudding plus a supply of sweets, tobacco and tea. There was a steady improvement in the diet and outings arranged in the Summer for the children and elderly. Some alterations took place on the building.

1880 At the workhouse in Wimborne the chapel doubled as the Board Room used fortnightly on Fridays. Orders were given for a fire to be lit every day. Lady visitors who had prior approval from the Guardians could now visit, signing in.

There was an outbreak of typhoid in Wimborne workhouse resulting in more earth closets being constructed.

1881 Reverend Carr John Glyn prepared a suitable hymn book for the Chaplain of the workhouse to use at Church services. There was still 'out relief' of 2/6d plus a loaf being paid to twenty people in the parish of Wimborne. There were six in Hampreston.

Now that the Police were involved in dealing with tramps the return of vagrants to the casual wards of the Workhouse numbered 357 for the three months to December the previous year. Mr Burt gave notice that at the next

Committee meeting he intended to draw attention to the number of paupers in Wimborne and Hampreston receiving 2/6d plus a loaf, the numbers being higher than in any other parishes in the Union.

The unemployment figures locally rose dramatically in the winter but men still refused to enter the workhouse. They were allowed some relief in bread by the Guardians and the Local Government Board asked that the Relieving Officers see to this matter and keep a watchful eye on the situation between their meetings.

In the Wimborne workhouse there were now 61 males and 43 females plus staff. One male resident was 90 years old. Inmates still worked at bone crushing despite the practice falling out of use elsewhere. The regular meetings of the Guardians kept detailed minutes. The Poor Law Commissioners inspected the accounts and occasionally disallowed a particular payment. The Guardians were then in the habit of paying the expense themselves. The annual cost was £3864 of which Wimborne had to contribute £982 from the rates. The cost of meat purchased from Chissell & Son, butchers in Wimborne was £66-14-8d for three months. According to the Census returns there were 110 people at the Workhouse. The Master was Charles Taylor and his wife Mary was Matron. There was a Schoolmistress, Edith Parsons, a Nurse, Elizabeth Spratt, Cook, Julia Shearing and a Master's Assistant who was 74 years old, William Lucas.

1882 Female vagrants were accommodated in casual wards in the poor house. Men were bathed but both sexes had their clothes replaced as they were presumed to be carrying disease. Beds were just straw and a blanket, several in one room. 8oz of bread and 1pt of gruel for breakfast and the same for supper. Bread and cheese for lunch, not as nutritious as the diet given to able bodied inmates. Vagrants often suffered a series lack of vitamins. Women did not even get washing water and smelt bad. There was no protection from male vagrants which was why females hiring themselves for harvest work often preferred to sleep outside. Those in the casual wards were employed to scrub and clean the wards, break stones, or pick oakum, these harsh tasks acting as a deterrent.

1883 This year, the first mention of new inmates of the Wimborne workhouse being obliged to take a bath.

1884 In July Mr. T Westhorp was engaged to supply 1 ton of old rope or 'junk' for unpicking into oakum by inmates of the Wimborne workhouse. The shed where it was done had recently been burnt and would be replaced by the insurance money of £7.15.0d. The guardians got insurance cover of £3500 for the whole of the workhouse. A cook was needed but advertisements offering £5 plus beer money had not resulted in any success.

1886 Rev. Billington was appointed Chaplain to the Wimborne workhouse with a salary of £50 per year. There had been frequent approaches from non-conformist church officials to attend free of charge, all of which had been

refused. The workhouse was ostensibly Anglican but no account was taken of the inmates' beliefs.

1887 Until now water for the Workhouse had been drawn from wells. Wimborne Minster waterworks Co Ltd was formed to construct waterworks and supply water within the area of Wimborne town. Authorised share capital of £8000 – 800 shares @ £10. By 1890, £3640 had been issued.

1890 School mistress Edith Parsons was hired for Wimborne Workhouse at an annual salary of £26. Wimborne parish contains 12,848 acres, rateable value £24,034. The population at the last census was 5390 including 110 officers and inmates in the workhouse.

The Guardians of the Wimborne & Cranborne Union workhouse appear to have met fortnightly and minutes were taken which are kept in the Dorset History Centre.⁴⁰ These records make a note of who was admitted and who was refused aid and could therefore have been left to starve.

One boy was eventually released into the care of his uncle, Mr. Uyatt, in London after a cheque for £9-2-0d to cover his board and lodging to date, followed by another to buy suitable clothes was received. Why the boy had been lodged in the poorhouse when his father, who wrote to support the application, was still at home is not known.

Wimborne residents in other 'Welfare' institutions such as mental hospitals are also noted. Charles Joseph Park of Henbury Hall (West of Wimborne on the road to Dorchester) was Chairman for 32 years and also chairman of the Wimborne magistrates. None of the Guardians were paid. Rev. Carr John Glyn, rector of Witchampton was on the Board for almost 60 years. Many parishes were reluctant to pay the rate to support the workhouse. Hampreston was ordered to pay £150. Charles Taylor was Master and his wife, the matron. Edith Parsons was the school-mistress at £26 per year.

Christmas Dinner that year mentions that each was given 1lb of Cooked Meat, 1lb Pudding and 1pint of beer per head.

1891 By the late 1890s conditions in the Workhouse were improving – outings were arranged and the diet was better. They received gifts of tobacco and cakes etc. particularly at Christmas time.

Census Return – Wimborne - 6127 inhabitants; (6203 according to Kelly's directory) including 74 officers/inmates in the workhouse

1892 Gas lighting was installed at the Victoria hospital. A typhoid case was admitted to the alarm of their Committee. Although the hospital was 'for the poor' if someone was already receiving Parish relief they had to go to the Workhouse. Rich people were treated at home. The idea that poor sick people should now be admitted to the hospital was violently opposed. The Doctor threatened to withdraw his services. The workhouse Infirmary operating table was actually bigger than the one in the hospital.

⁴⁰ Board of Guardians, Wimborne & Cranborne Union 1887-1890 BG/WM:A1/17

1893 The purchase of Oakum started again. The sum of £13-16-9d was paid to E Lane. There is still a slight element of the poor and vagrants in the workhouse being a threat to the well-being of the Guardians and the town in general which had to pay for their care.

The Guardians were aware that the cost of living had risen considerably.

It was proposed to increase the rate of out-relief by 6d a week but the Guardians voted against this. Conditions under which out-relief would be paid were made more severe in order to force people to enter the workhouse. Lord Arlington heard of the Guardians refusal and paid the 6d a week out of his own money.

One man, Ezekial Sherwood, aged 70 whose wife was sick needed more money than was provided by his Service pension of £6-2-0d per year. He had served with the Royal Marines for 16 years and 237 days in Crimea, the Indian Mutiny and China War. The clerk tried to get him an increased pension but it is not known if this succeeded.

1895 The first meeting of Wimborne & Cranborne Rural District Council was held at the Union Workhouse in Wimborne. Medical officers were to be paid 2/6d to inspect applicants.

1896 Provision was made by the Trustees at the Workhouse of a shed, lavatory and E.C. at a cost of £60 noted in records 12th September, 1896. E.C. refers to Earth closet, a primitive toilet.

From now on Bread would no longer form part of the out-relief benefit. Their entitlement would be paid entirely in cash. The rate of relief was only 2/6d per week, no account being taken of the missing dietary staple.

A sad case came to the attention of the Guardians involving a young 'idiot boy'. Discharged from the Dorset County Asylum after being diagnosed as incurable, the boy was delivered to his parents in Ferndown only two or three hours later. There he was stripped of his clothes which apparently belonged to the asylum and left in the care of his parents who were wholly unable to care for him. He needed full time care but there is no entry in the registers to say that he was admitted to the workhouse.

Some men who had received relieve during a period of unemployment were asked to refund the money when they found work.

1899 Those people from Colehill who were in receipt of Poor Relief payments, would now be allowed to present themselves at the Coffee Tavern on Colehill Lane instead of walking to Wimborne Workhouse.

1900 Blandford Cottage hospital was an isolation facility at this time. The Council was later reminded that any cases of plague in the area must be reported to the Local Government Board. This was minuted on 19th October 1900. The Master of the Workhouse, Mr Wareham, was instructed to report any paupers suffering from infectious diseases.

1901 Vagrancy increased after soldiers returned but the conditions in the poor house were made deliberately harsh to deter applicants. Men had to break stones for use in road repair.

1903 The trustees of the Workhouse spent £82 on the erection of a mortuary and alterations to the workhouse. Inmates were allowed to join the celebrations for the Coronation of King Edward VII. Fire escapes were fitted and the attic rooms ceased to be dormitories as they were deemed a fire hazard.

Mr Luff, Clerk to the Guardians, asked if the Union (Workhouse) could subscribe to the hospital on the basis that paupers might be admitted for major operations. The Victoria Hospital Committee replied that it was contrary to their Rules. Members of the working classes would be admitted providing their wages did not exceed 18/- per week. Domestic servants should be admitted provided employers paid 5/- per week. No one on Parochial relief could be admitted.⁴¹ Patients in the Workhouse infirmary were taken to the hospital at St Leonards.

1904 More fire escapes were provided at the Workhouse. The children's playground was drained and gravelled.

The birth certificate of a child born in the workhouse was no longer required to be quite so exact and could just put East Borough or even a fictional Wimborne address.

1905 Unemployed Workmens' Act dealt with the distress of vagrants who had started travelling in small crowds giving rise to complaints from local officials. These men headed for areas where softer stone was being broken for road repair. Persistent beggars were gaoled. It was suggested that labour camps be set up as in Germany. Wimborne workhouse may have issued 'way tickets' entitling those leaving to obtain bread and cheese for a mid-day meal on their travels the next day in order to prevent begging but the cost is not recorded. From photographs held by the Priest's House Museum in Wimborne it would appear that Christmas was celebrated at the workhouse and 'helpers' from the local community were seen to be involved at this time.

⁴¹ Watson – Notes PHM



The volunteers posed for this photographed outside the workhouse.
Courtesy of the Priest's House Museum Collections Trust



Christmas decorations and buffet 1905
Courtesy of the Priest's House Museum Collections Trust

1906 Non-conformist ministers were asked if they would hold occasional meeting in the Wimborne workhouse on the strict basis that work would not be disrupted, nor must the services of the Anglican chaplain be inconvenienced. However when the Guardians met to consider this, there was a 10 – 2 decision to refuse the suggestion to go ahead. They did however allow an electricity supply

to be connected and bell pushes in the old men's ward.

A pauper child from the Workhouse was sent to work for Mrs Allison of Fox Farm at Leigh for a trial period.

1910 A man living in Ferndown was apparently suffering from pulmonary consumption and was sent by Wimborne UDC to the Workhouse at Wimborne. Mr Watson's notes add that this must have been the worst possible place to send him!

1914 Three Red Cross hospitals were established in East Dorset. They were known as VAD hospitals because they came under the auspices of Voluntary Aid Detachments and were largely staffed by volunteers. Beaucroft House in Colehill above Wimborne, Wimborne Workhouse Infirmary, and a further one in Sturminster Marshall. These three accommodated 148 men.

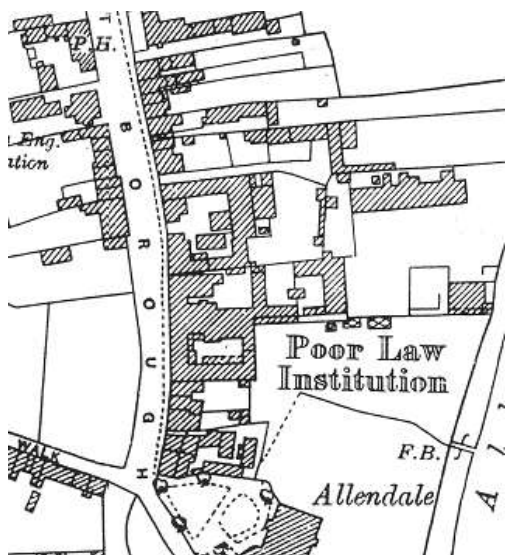
1916 The Infirmary Red Cross Hospital with nurses in tents on bank of River Allen opened in April. It was situated at The Workhouse on East Street. Mrs Seymour, Mrs Trehane and Sister Underwood are shown on a postcard in 1918. ⁴²

From 1920 death certificates no longer legally needed to state that a pauper had died in the workhouse. The officials could just use the street name. This was thought to be a more Christian approach to the relatives and descendants.

1928 Prime Minister Chamberlain abolished Boards of Guardians for workhouses which were re-named Public Assistance Institutions. The burden of the charges for poor relief fell on small areas so that the care of the poor was calculated on the amount raised rather than the amount needed to maintain the poor.

From the street map published this year the 'Poor Law Institution' has a very wide frontage on East Borough. It is possible, in my opinion, that the Wimborne workhouse set up in 1697 in a property with a pond and ground lying near Walford bridge, and the plot belonging to Elizabeth Raven sold to the committee of Guardians in 1750 together with the additional land purchased in 1868 are contiguous and became the 'Workhouse' adjacent to the Castleman property, Allendale.

⁴² Workhouse files at Priest's House museum



East Borough – Wimborne Workhouse 1928

1929 Dorset County Council took over responsibility for the workhouse which had become known as the 'Public Assistance Institution' or Allen View House.

1930 An Inquest was reported in *The Times* of 23rd October before Coroner Mr. R Neville-Jones – The bodies of Thomas Edwin Holloway (61) farmer of Walford, Louisa Barbara Holloway, (51) his wife and Capt Frank Hawkeswood Burdett (59) their son in law. The husband and wife were shot in bedroom and the Capt. found a little later under a tree with gun-shot wounds from which he later died after admission to the Poor Law infirmary. (Burdett was not taken to the Victoria Hospital which might have owned better treatment facilities.) Verdicts - Premeditated and willful murder of Mr and Mrs. Holloway and suicide of Burdett. Burdett had been seen by the Holloway's son with a double barrellled shot gun. He had been accused of abducting the youngest daughter, Beatrix Alexandra May Holloway, known as Trixie. Application had been made for the Bench's consent to their marriage, she being only 18. In fact the parents had already given their consent. Burdett married on 28th May by License at Wimborne Registry Office. He was described as a retired army officer, his residence in Dogdean called Handcraft house. He was now a handicraft worker and had recently appealed for funds for the work on behalf of ex-service men. He spent money freely and forbade her to visit her parents. As an attempted suicide he could not be buried in the consecrated part of the cemetery. Another grave was hastily dug and without the benefit of clergy prayers his body was laid to rest. It was widely thought that he was insane. For a few brief weeks those who had been in the infirmary or nursed there would have basked in the lurid attention of the inmates. The ghastly murder was headline news in many papers. The victims' funeral by contrast was held in the Minster and crowds lined the streets and the consecrated area of the cemetery.

The last meeting of the Guardians of the Wimborne & Cranborne Union workhouse was held on 28th March. George Bannister, the Chairman mentioned the low cost for maintaining the inmates of the Poor Law Institution. 7/3d per week, much lower than other districts. The press had

been allowed to attend this final board-meeting. No further records appear to have been kept.

Now termed the 'Public Assistance Institution' the inmates must have been transferred to the out-relief programme or otherwise dispersed. The building then became Allen House and was altered to accommodate elderly people. A matron was employed when it was ready to be opened in 1939.

1939 Allen House, previously the Workhouse, opened as a Home for the Elderly with a matron in charge. Strangely, there does not appear to be an identifiable entry for this property in the 1941 Census list.

1948 Wimborne workhouse was taken over by the National Health Service and became East Borough Hospital. Monday was bath day. Those in 'Part Three', i.e. the poor but not sick residents, helped with laundry etc. Many were buried at the parish expense and taken by handcart pushed by two inmates with a small wreath on top paid for by the staff. Christmas presents consisted of oranges and chocolate biscuits plus 1/- (5p) from the Master. Many inmates never had any visitors.

One of the ladies who was employed there was Mrs Jean Williams. The hospital at the rear of the building was no longer the workhouse. The inmates of the latter, many of whom had no other home, now lived in the front part or Part Three.

A 48 hour working week at the hospital started on Monday with bath day. Many patients had to be lifted from bed to chair to bath and back again. Most had to be fed. Many beds required frequent changing.

At Christmas each female member of staff had a room or ward to decorate. She was paid £4-10-0d a week and often had to pay for little presents out of her own pocket. The Master used to fill a bath tub with oranges and biscuits plus a few chocolate biscuits in small bags. Each patient was given 1/-. The staff sang Christmas carols but still had to empty bedpans and deal with the incontinent patients. Sometimes the hospital staff would go and help the poor house inmates to bathe, some of whom were indignant and difficult to handle. The laundry appears to have been done by the Part Three inmates. She once saw a Poor Law funeral and found it upsetting. One of the male inmates was put in a cheap coffin and put on a hand bier. Two other men pushed it to the cemetery following the vicar. The staff banded together and paid for a bunch of flowers to go on top. The deceased had no family, no mourners. On night duty she had to go to Part Three at midnight and again first thing in the morning as there were no night staff for the workhouse inmates. Sometimes a male orderly would accompany the nurse. It was possible to get into the loft above Part Three women's ward, over the Matron's apartment, over the cook's room and the men's ward. There were many toys there because the babies and small children used to be looked after in the small cottage in the grounds. The records show that many Wimborne women went into the Poor Law

Institution infirmary to give birth.⁴³ It was still known colloquially as ‘the Workhouse’ but had obviously lost much of its stigma. A qualified midwife was on hand to assist.

1955 Allen House (ex Workhouse) on East Borough, which became a home for the elderly, was now the subject of plans to adapt the building to be a Grammar School annexe.

1958 The building was demolished to make way for Allen Court flats. The door of the Workhouse has been preserved and is now at The Priest’s House museum in Wimborne.

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⁴³ Memories of Wimborne Workhouse in late 1940’s by Mrs Jean Williams (PHM file)