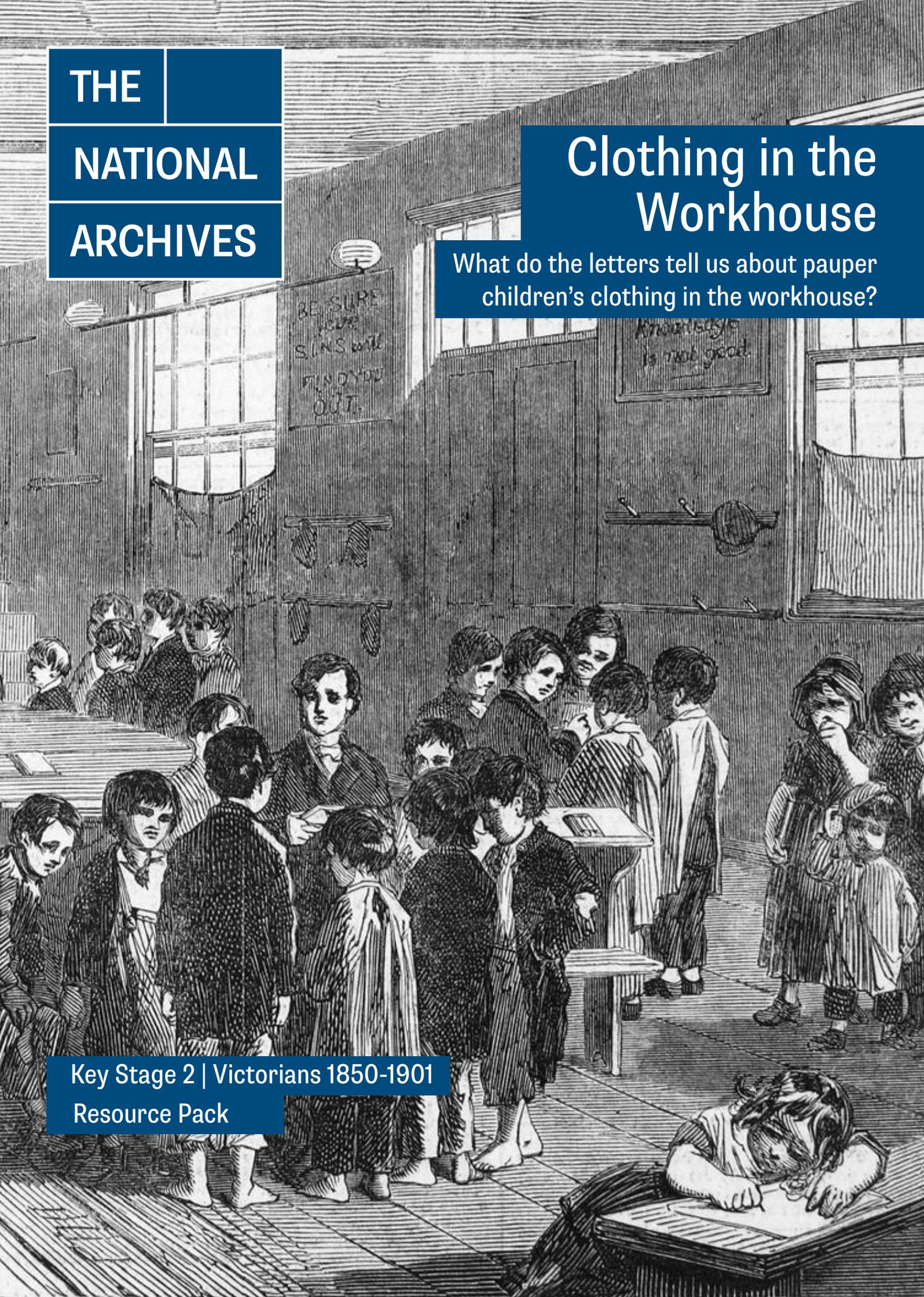


Clothing in the Workhouse

What do the letters tell us about pauper children's clothing in the workhouse?



Key Stage 2 | Victorians 1850-1901
Resource Pack

Introduction

This lesson explores source material in the form of letters written by Paupers which were sent to the Poor Law Commission in London, generally complaining about the treatment and conditions the pauper children were enduring. The pupils will analyse the individual letters to gain an understanding of some of the things which happened to children during this time.

This lesson focuses on clothing and is part of a series of lessons which include a focus on Southwell Workhouse followed by two other lessons focussing on schooling and food.

This lesson will support an exploration of the Victorians where it is either your post 1066 unit or linked to local history, for example if you have a local workhouse that is now a hospital or converted for other uses. It could also be used if you were exploring children's experiences through history.

Suitable for:

KS 2

Time period:

Victorians
1850 - 1901

Connections to the Curriculum:

Childhood through time

The Victorians

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Name:

Children's clothing in the workhouse		
Source	What we can learn from the sources	What we can infer from the sources
Letter One		
Letter Two		
Southwell Union Guardians Quote		
Extract from Street Child		

Tasks

Children to complete the table below as you read through the letters, look at the image and extract from Street Child. The children should use quotes from the sources to support them.

Letter One

Discuss as a class and perhaps focus on the following vocabulary:

Wretched, Preceding, Stockings, Sufficiently

Focus points to discuss:

- What impression are we given from the use of the word wretched to describe the state of the bedding?
- How long is the 20th of February after Christmas?
- What does this tell us about the amount of time they had to wait for Stockings?
- How do you think the children felt waiting this long? If you had to wait this long, do you think you would have noticed?
- What do you think it meant by 'having no appointed clothing on their own...but wearing such as they could get'? Why do you think they didn't have clothing of their own?
- What impression can we make about the time of year and the weather? How might not being sufficiently clothed at this time of year be an issue?
- Why should they not attend church? What can we imply about the importance of going to church and what they would wear there?

Letter Two

Discuss as a class and perhaps focus on the following vocabulary:

Frocks, Pinafores, Deficient, Middling supply, Chilblains, Itch and scald head

Focus points to discuss:

- How is this different to the experience in the first letter?
- How is this similar to the experience in the first letter?
- What impression do these two letters give you about the children's clothing?

Southwell Union Guardians Quote

- Why might they have suggested that they wear long sleeves?
- Discuss, what are drawers? Why would it be an issue that the children didn't have any?

Get the children to think about the building, could show them the building plan of Southwell. The children may need directing to the temperature of the building.

Street Child by Berlie Doherty

- Is the impression given from the book the same as that from the letters? How so? Is anything different?

Final discussion point:

- From the sources examined today, what impression have we been given about children's clothing in the workhouse?

Letter One - Extracts from The Barnsley Times

Catalogue Ref: MH12/14677, 25617/1856

THE BARNSELY TIMES, SATURDAY, JUNE 7, 1856.

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GUARDIANS.

Justly entitled to.

That on entering on my duties the 20th February last, I found the children, their clothing, and bedding in a most wretched state. Out of a total of thirty-five, nine had not had a pair of clean stockings on since Christmas preceding, ten entirely without stockings, and a many having no appointed clothing of their own, as required by Article No. 8 of the Duties of the Matron," but wearing such as they could get. The Guardians will therefore readily perceive that a length of time would necessarily elapse to restore such a state of things to proper order, to accomplish which I have risen, with few exceptions, at five o'clock in the morning, and retired to rest at eleven o'clock at night, and sat up the whole of three nights, employing myself diligently in instructing the children, and making and repairing their clothing, bedding, and bed linen, leaving no time for self-improvement.

That the children are not sufficiently clothed yet, although I have repeatedly applied to the Master for what I conceive to be necessary for their comfort and cleanliness, whose repeated promises to supply it remain unperformed, having no later than this day fortnight delivered to him at his request five boys' hats to be exchanged for new ones, and not receiving either the new or old ones back, the children had to remain from church the following day.

That I have not received the assistance of the Matron, (three months old); whereas, my two predecessors had two such assistants. Nor am I supplied with the necessary quantity of soap and other articles for that purpose, being two entire weeks without a morsel of blacking, all the children in consequence going to church with unblackened shoes. I weekly deliver to the master a list of all such articles and clothing as I conceive to be necessary, but it is rare I receive what I name, and such as I do receive is perhaps days and even weeks afterwards.

That I am not, as I am informed, the only officer who having for their office.

I am, gentlemen, your obedient servant,
ANNA WOODHEAD.

Union Workhouse, Barnsley,
10th May, 1856.

Communication from Mr. J. Ellam registrar

Letter One - Transcript

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I am, gentlemen, your obedient servant, Anna Woodhead.

Union Workhouse, Barnsley. 10th May 1856

Letter Two

Catalogue Ref: MH 12/13304, 33457/1855

10 A.

Sarah Hemmings residing at the
Workhouse of the parish of Birmingham being
I am begg. I have been in the parish
the children of the parish where your
near children. I am please see the
Infants School Report. I remember
Mr Ogden having Mr. Then says as
that from a very bad supply of linen
clothing for the infants. I include in
and stated that the children being begg. I
applied to Mr Ogden as there is the one
practice respecting the state of the
in as to the supply of linen & clothes. A
letter was sent on the head from the
workhouse to the school at my place to get
the same things, & the same kind come. A
child a month ago from the same things
purple, pink, blue, white & flannels. I think
I had a complete supply with the
exception of stockings. The stockings have
remained deficient. I should say I
have had a considerable supply for
four months. Quite that long. The
defects were the pink & flannels &

that a week. The purifiers were almost
gone in a week. This was after I had a supply
for the Mother. When the Mother paid over the
children's goods were sometimes not allowed to
a month. Sometimes the children have had
I know their stockings were a few weeks. The
largest number of defects I have had under
my care is 45. They were all under 4 years
old. Being the deficiency of quality I ordered
some of the best from the parish. I have a week. I
had a very middling supply of shoes, as I
applied for the 3rd time when they were in
store. It sometimes happens that there were
some in store that I had a good way to
supplied my feet; but it is a good way to
defects were not sent off for them. Some
of the shoes were sent out of the parish
they had to wear them in the shoes. I am
thinking of shoes from the parish. I had
but one supply for children able to wear
I had some in hand. I had some supplies
for the children and they were. I had but
one pair of shoes. My wife was
sent for the children. My wife was
one a week; but I ordered them at
my morning. I am not aware

that it was kind of my duty to make them
washed and every morning. The two things
were used indifferently for all the children. I
had four coats, two breeches. One coat was
left on purpose for children with scold heads
Sometimes the Mother visited by some men
a week, sometimes she is a fortnight. The
Mother visited by some men sometimes often
from the Mother to some times longer. The
Mother came to the yard sometimes from the
over a week, but not so to some. The
children with scold heads were always
washed last. The laundry were not used
against washed long weeks. The laundry
were not washed with soap. Most
washing was not sufficient. I was applied
by the Mother's request to the system for
I had to be sent to work with
the same quantity & I would do so. In
a few days I had a quantity of
applied for. I had a quantity of
sent to the Mother & Mother when they visited.
My wife had been visited the day before
when I was in the last week. I had not

at Birmingham
14th August 1877
Sarah Hemmings
288
Birmingham

Letter Two - Transcript

I applied to Mrs Ogden as soon as she was Matron respecting the state my place was in as to the supply of linen & clothes. She told me as soon as she had time she would come & look at my place & get me some things, & she came did same. In about a month she gave me some things frocks, pinafores, shirts & flannels. Afterwards I had a comfortable supply with the exception of stockings. The stockings have remained deficient. I should say I have had a comfortable supply for four months. Quite that long. The infants wore [three] frocks flannels & shirts a week. The Pinafores were changed twice a Week. This was after I had a supply from the Matron. When the Matron first came the children's frocks were sometimes not changed for a month. Sometimes the children have had to wear their stockings three or four weeks. The largest number of Infants I have had under my care is 45. They were all under 4 years old. During the deficiency of articles I washed the xxxxxx often them often. Twice a week. I had a very middling supply of shoes, as I applied for them I got them when they were in store. It sometimes happened that there were none in store & that I went without. It happened very often; but in a general way the Infants were not bad off for shoes. Some xx of their shoes xxxxx were out at toe, & sometimes they had to wear their own shoes. I am speaking of shoes since Septr last. I had but one suffering from chilblains all the winter and that came in bad. I had some suffering from itch & scald head. When those came [****] found out [*****]. I had six towels for these children. They were changed once a week; but I washed them out every morning. I am not aware that it was part of my duty to wash these towels out every morning. The six towels were used indifferently for all the children. I had four combs, no brushes. The combs were kept on purpose for children with scald heads.

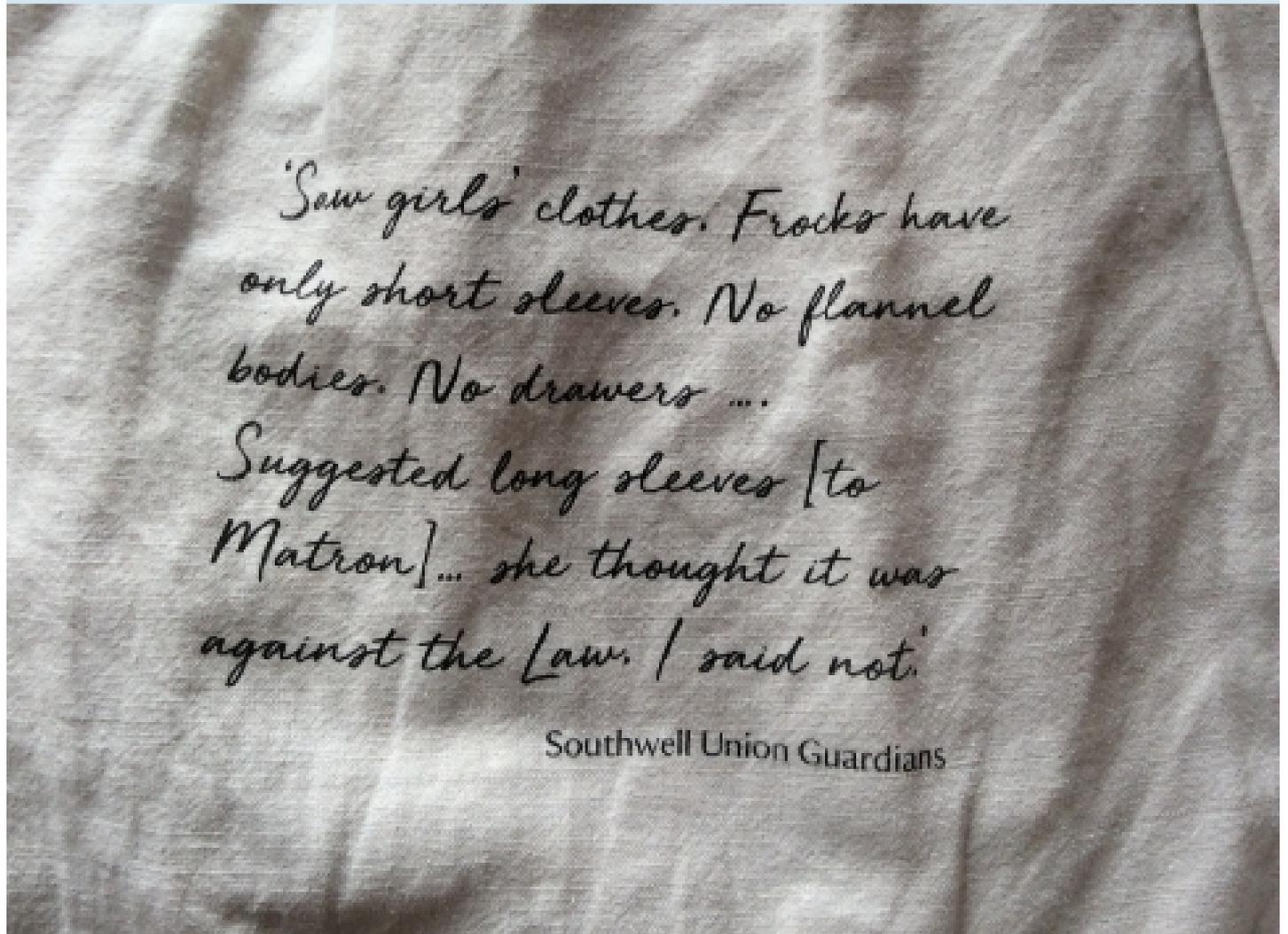
The children with scald head were always washed last. The towels were not used again without being washed. The Towels were xxxxx not washed with soap. That washing was not sufficient.

Sarah Hemming

Sworn at Birmingham the 10th August 1855 before me Alfred Austin, Poor Law Inspector

Southwell Union Guardians Quote

National Trust - The Workhouse Southwell



Transcript

'Saw girls' clothes. Frocks have only short sleeves. No flannel bodies. No drawers...
Suggested long sleeves [to Matron]... she thought it was against the law. I said not.'

Southwell Union Guardians