THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Workhouse Women

How were women treated in the Victorian workhouse?

Key Stage 3 | Empire and Industry 1750-1850

Resource Pack

Introduction

The seven letters selected within this resource show a wealth of varied experiences of women inside the workhouse. The lesson can either use the letters in full or the teacher can select sections of the letters. Students are encouraged to analyse each letter, focusing on the treatment of women and their mental health.

Learning objective: To investigate the varied experiences of women in the workhouse.
To analyse and make inferences about a source.

Resources needed: Printed sources.

This lesson was created as part of the Voices of the Victorian Poor Teacher Scholar Programme

Suitable for:

KS 3

Time period:

Empire and Industry 1750-1850

Connections to the Curriculum:

Ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain, 1745-1901

Contents

Introduction	Page 2.
Tasks	Page 3.
Exeter Workhouse 1744	Page 5.
Source 1	Page 6.
Worksheet	Page 8.
Source A (1)	Page 9.
Source A (2)	Page 13.
Source B	Page 15.
Source C	Page 17.
Source D	Page 19.
Source E	Page 21.
Source F	Page 23.
Source G	Page 25.

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Tasks

Task One: Class Discussion

Key questions:
What is a workhouse?
Why do we think some people need to move to indoor relief?
Do we think everyone's experiences of the workhouse were the same?

Students to analyse the survey included in the Return Book from Mitford and Launditch workhouse in Norfolk (Source 1). Students then complete an inference question: What can we infer about people entering the workhouse based on the source?

Task Two:
Look at the five pieces of information about conditions within the workhouse. In groups students should remember one key fact each and then under timed conditions share their key fact with their group. Students then feedback and compare what they have learned about the experiences of women in the Victorian workhouse.

Task Three:
Students should look at each letter and complete the table. They should include the TNA catalogue reference, the name of the person writing the letter, key details from the letter and then finally answering the question "how were they treated within the workhouse?"

There are additional questions to aid students in their analysis.
Source A (1) and (2):
What does 'tethered to the bedstead mean?'
What was the woman doing when she was not supervised?
What had the medical officer made the woman wear?
What did the inspector direct the workhouse employees to do?

Source B:
What had the women done?
What were the women complaining about in the letter?
What were they arguing should have happened to them?

Source C:
What are the women requesting?

Source D:
What does the woman feel she is threatened with?
What was her previous experience?

Source E:
What had she applied for before?
What was she unhappy about regarding her experience in the workhouse?

Tasks

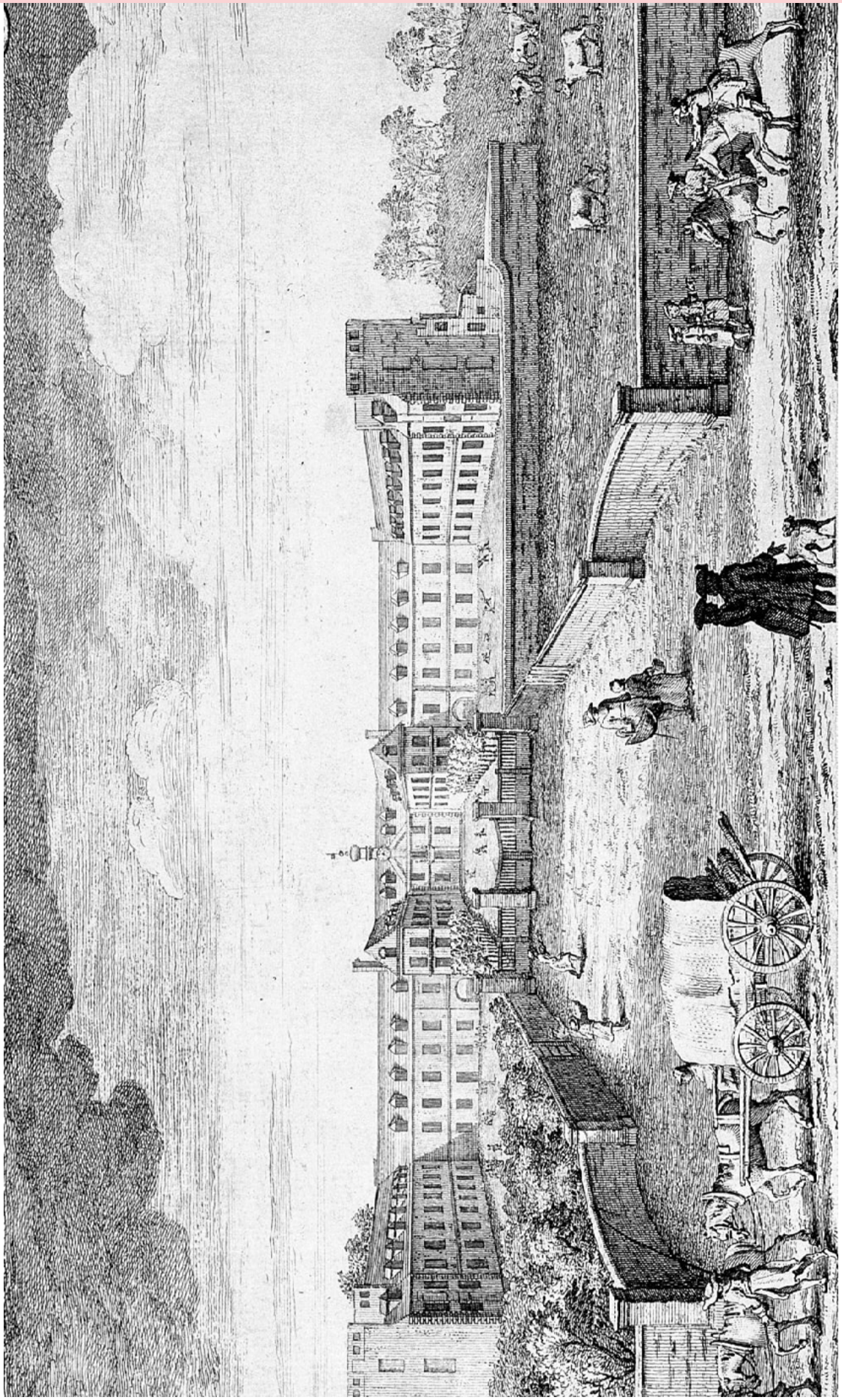
Challenge:
Source F:
What had the Poor Law inspector observed?
What suggestions did the inspector have about improving conditions in the workhouse?

Source G:
Why does Catherine disagree with the term 'lunatic'?
What is Catherine's experience of the workhouse?
What has she heard about Lunatic Asylums?

Task Four:
Students write an introduction to a time-travellers guide about the experiences of women in the workhouse: including an answer to the question: What was life like for women in the Victorian workhouse?

Exeter Workhouse, 1744

Catalogue Ref: WO78/5781



Source 1 - A return of all female paupers in the Workhouse

Catalogue Ref: MH32/84

Milford & Saundith Union.

RECEIVED P.L.D. APR 19 1861

A RETURN of all FEMALE PAUPERS of the Age of 16 years and upwards in the Workhouse on the Sixth day of ~~March~~ April 1861, classified according to character.

	Total.
1. Single women pregnant with their first child	1
2. Single women who have had one bastard child	5
3. Single women who have had one bastard child and are pregnant again	4
4. Single women who have had two bastard children	5
5. Single women who have had three bastard children	3
6. Single women who have had four or more bastard children	3
7. Idiotic or weak-minded single women with one or more bastard children	"
8. Women whose out-relief has been taken off on account of misconduct	"
9. Women incapable of getting their own living from syphilis	"
10. Prostitutes	-
11. Girls who have been out at service, but do not keep their places on account of misconduct	1
12. Girls brought up in the Workhouse and who have been out at service, but have returned on account of misconduct	3
13. Widows who have had one or more bastard children during their widowhood	4
14. Married women with husbands in the Workhouse	4
15. Married women with husbands transported or in gaol	"
16. Married women deserted by their husbands	3
17. Imbecile, idiotic, or weak-minded women and girls	7
18. Respectable women and girls incapable of getting their living on account of illness or other bodily defect or infirmity	7
19. Respectable able-bodied women and girls	6
20. Respectable aged women	7
	63.

I certify the above return as correct,

R. W. Scraggs

Master of the Workhouse.

3226. E. & S.—750.—3/61.

6 April 1861
R.W.S.

Source 1 - Transcript

Mitford and Launditch Union

A return of all female paupers of the age of 16 years and upwards in the workhouse on the sixth day of April 1861, classified according to character.

	TOTAL
1. Single women pregnant with their first child	1
2. Single women who have had one bastard child	5
3. Single women who had had one bastard child and are pregnant again	4
4. Single women who have had two bastard children	5
5. Single women who have had three bastard children	3
6. Single women who have had four or more bastard children	3
7. Idiotic or weak-minded single women with one or more bastard children	-
8. Women whose out-relief has been taken off on account of misconduct	-
9. Women incapable of getting their own living from syphillis	-
10. Prostitutes	-
11. Girls who have been out at service, but do not keep their places on account of misconduct	1
12. Girls brought up in the workhouse and who have been out at service, but have returned on account of misconduct	3
13. Widows who have had one of more bastard children during their widowhood	4
14. Married women with husbands in the workhouse	4
15. Married women with husbands transported or in gaol	-
16. Married women deserted by their husbands	3
17. Imbecile, idiotic, or weak-minded women and girls	7
18. Respectable women and girls incapable of getting their living on account of illness or other bodily defect of infirmity	7
19. Respectable able-bodied women and girls	6
10. Respectable aged women	7
	63

I certify the above return as correct
R. W. Scraggs
Master of the Workhouse

Name:

How were women treated in the Workhouse?

Catalogue Reference	Name of person on letter	Details about their experience	How were they treated in the workhouse?

Source A (1)

Catalogue Ref: MH12/3420, 78201/1896

A

189 .

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT JOURNAL.

JUNE 6, 1896.

Chelmsford.—It transpired at the meeting of the Board of Guardians, on Tuesday, that an old woman, over 90 years of age, was chained to the wall a few hours every day "to prevent her getting into mischief!" The Medical Officer is to make a special report upon the case.

Dr. Preston Thomas

Would you kindly say if you know anything of the matter referred to in the marked paragraph.

LRK

Jun 8.

REFERENCE ONLY L.G.B.

Dr. Preston Thomas

Note 9.6.96

Source A (1) - Transcript

CIRCUMTEXT:

Mr Preston Thomas

Would you kindly say if you know anything of the matter referred to in the marked paragraph [LBK]
June 8
Mr Preston Thomas 9 6 96

TEXT:
THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT JOURNAL.
JUNE6, 1896

Chelmsford – It transpired at the meeting of the Board of Guardians, on Tuesday, that an old woman, over 90 years of age, was chained to the wall a few hours every day “to prevent her getting into mischief!” The Medical Officer is to make a special report upon the case.

Source A (2)

Catalogue Ref: MH12/3420, 78201/1896

DEPOSIT DEPT.
F. 011
I. D.

Chelmsford

124

78201/96

Mr Knollys,

Before receiving your minute of the 8th inst. I had yesterday inspected the Chelmsford Workhouse & found that a woman named Sarah Ann Nelson, (admitted to the Workhouse on the 11th January 1894) aged about ninety, had been placed under restraint in accordance with the certificate dated the Medical Officer of the Workhouse of the 6th February last, entered in the Register of Mechanical Restraint & couched in the following terms:-

Name. Workhouse. Certificate.

'Sarah Ann Nelson ~~[illegible]~~ Constant.

"I certify that restraint was employed in this case on the following grounds:- old age, constantly trying to get to the fire and fire-irons, has fallen in fender two or three times. Tethered to bedstead so that she cannot wander more than two yards from bedside.

(sd) Thos H. Walker."

I learnt that Nelson, though not under certificate as an imbecile, was weak-minded; that when not supervised she had seized every opportunity of wildly running about; that she had in this way fallen down a flight of four stone steps; that she had wandered away from the Workhouse and been brought back by the Relieving Officer from two or three miles distant; that she had a sort of mania for playing with fire & had repeatedly burnt her fingers by taking live coals from the grate; & that she had been a constant source of anxiety to the Nurses & of annoyance to the other inmates of the Infirmary.

The Medical Officer had therefore caused her to wear a padded belt round her middle and this was secured by a strong leather strap several feet in length fastened to a staple in the wall by her bedside. When I visited the Workhouse I found her in a courtyard basking in the sun but tethered to the bench on which she was sitting.

I immediately directed the removal of the belt, and the Matron, Matron & Nurse undertook that in no circumstances should it be used again. I ~~complained~~ admitted that someone must at once be obtained to keep the woman under constant supervision, and I arranged with the Clerk to the Guardians that this should be done, pending a decision on her ultimate disposal. I also called on the Medical Officer, explained to him that as the woman was not certified under the Lunacy Act he had no business to keep her under restraint and that even if she had been so certified the only mechanical means permissible would be those specified in the regulations made by the Lunacy Commissioners on the 17th April 1895 of which I gave him a copy. I also suggested that even the appliances described in that regulation was not intended to be used in such cases as Nelson's and that conduct like hers must be dealt with by personal supervision and not by mechanical restraint. The Medical Officer expressed regret for having acted in ignorance of the law & stated that he proposed forthwith to take the necessary steps for having the woman removed to the County Lunatic Asylum.

I have no doubt that the adoption of this treatment - injudicious as it was - was prompted by the best motives. The belt was so made as not to hurt the old woman; she seemed perfectly well & talked cheerfully. She will, I understand, be sent to the County Lunatic Asylum as soon as the legal formalities can be completed - and that is the best place for her.

H Merton Thomas
June 10/96

Mr Knollys
11.6.96

Dr Russell
This is an unpleasant case. but I do not think any further action by the Board seems necessary, as Mr Merton Thomas has spoken to the Matron
B K Knollys

June 13.96

I agree
16.6.96

Put by.
BK
June 17.

Source A (2) - Transcript

CIRCUMTEXT:

Mr Knollys 11.6.96
Mt Russell. This is an unpleasant case, but I do not think any further action by the Board seems necessary as Mr Preston Thomas has spoken to the officers. Knollys June 13. 1896
I agree. 16.6.96 Put by. W.K. June 7

TEXT:

Mr Knollys

Before receiving your minute of the 8th instant, I had yesterday inspected the Chelmsford Workhouse & found that a woman named Sally Ann Nelson (admitted to the Workhouse on the 11th January 1894) aged about ninety had been placed under restraint in accordance with the certificate of ^[dated]^ the Medical Officer of the 6th February last, entered in the register of Mechanical Restraint & couched in the following

terms: -

Name. Sarah Ann Nelson Duration. Constant Certificate.

"I certify that restraint was employed in this case on the following grounds: - old age, constantly trying to get to the fire and fireirons, has fallen in fender two or three times. Tethered to bedstead so that she cannot wander more than two yards from her bedside. (sd) [Theo. H. Waller"

I learned that Nelson, although not under certificate as an imbecile, was weak-minded; that when not supervised she has seized every opportunity of running about; that she has in this way fallen down a flight of four stone steps; that she has wandered away from the Workhouse and been brought back by the Relieving Officer from two or three miles distant; that she had a sort of mania for playing with fire and had repeatedly burnt her fingers by taking live coals from the grate, & that she has been a constant source of anxiety to the Nurses & of annoyance to the other inmates of the Infirmary.

The Medical Officer had therefore caused her to wear a padded belt round her middle and this was secured by a strong leather strap several feet in length fastened to a staple in the wall by her bedside. When I visited the Workhouse, I found her in a courtyard basking in the sun but tethered to the bench on which she was sitting.

I immediately directed the removal of the belt, and the Master, Matron & Nurse undertook that in no circumstances should it be used again. I explained added that someone must be at once obtained to keep the woman under constant supervision, and I arranged with the Clerk to the Guardians that this should be done, pending a decision on her ultimate disposal. I also called on the Medical Officer, explained to him that as the woman was not certified under the Lunacy Act, he had no busines to keep her under restraint and that even if she had been so certified the only ^mechanical^ means permissible would be those specified in the regulation made by the Lunacy Commissioners on the 17th April 1895 of which I gave him a copy.

Also suggested that even the apparatus described in that regulation was not intended to be used

Source A (2) - Transcript continued.

in such cases as Nelson's and that conduct like hers must be dealt with by personal supervision and not by mechanical restraint. The Medical Officer expressed regret for having acted in ignorance of the law, & stated that he proposed forthwith to take the necessary steps for having the woman removed to the County Lunatic Asylum.

I have no doubt that the adoption of this treatment – injudicious as it was – was prompted by the best motives. The belt was so made as to not hurt the old woman; she seemed perfectly well & talked cheerfully. She will, I understand, be sent to the County Lunatic Asylum as soon as the legal formalities can be completed and that is the best place for her.

H. Preston Thomas June 10/96

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Source B

Catalogue Ref: MH12/3436, 5552/1860

5552/60. (Copy.)

Black Boy Lane
Colchester, Feb 8. 1860.

Right Hon Sir.

We the undersigned beg to draw your attention to the following circumstance trusting you will call upon the respective parties for a thorough explanation of their conduct.

On the evening of Wednesday Jany. 25th being inmates of the Colchester Union, we escaped over the wall but did not take any property whatever belonging to the Guardians. To our surprise we were the same evening apprehended by Police Superintendent Downes and another Policeman at the instance of the Master of the Union House.

We understand that according to the Poor Law Rules escaping from the Union House is no offence unless property belonging to the Guardians be taken away also by the same rules that the Union Officers are not empowered to apprehend or cause to be apprehended persons so escaping.

The Police have therefore acted illegally (as also the Master of the House) in apprehending us. We also understand that when a Policeman apprehends a person the person should be charged in the usual way and conveyed before a Magistrate but this was not done, we were taken in custody of the Police to the Union House and detained till the following afternoon. If the Police were justified in apprehending us, omitting the question of a Warrant altogether, why were we not taken before a Magistrate, if not justified why were we apprehended at all.

We beg most humbly to apologize for submitting the matter to you but considering that an outrage has been committed on the liberty of the subject we think it right to acquaint you of it to prevent a recurrence of such conduct

We are, Rt. Hon Sir
Your most humble Sert.
(signed) Sarah Johnson
Harriet Percival

Source B - Transcript

TEXT:
(Copy.)
Black Boy Lane
Colchester. Feb 8. 1860.

Right Hon Sir,
We the undersigned beg to draw your attention to the following circumstance trusting you will call upon the respective parties for a thorough explanation of their conduct.
On the evening of Wednesday Jany 25th, being inmates of the Colchester Union, we escaped over the Wall but did not take any property whatever belonging to the Guardians. To our surprise we were the same evening apprehended by Police Superintendent Downes and another Policeman at the instance of the Master of the Union House.
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We are, Rt. Hon Sir
Your most humble Servts
(signed) Sarah Johnson Harriet Percival

Source C

Catalogue Ref: MH12/6858, 36582/1869

POOR LAW BOARD
JUL 20
1869.
RECEIVED

259

Bethnal Green
Workhouse
July 16th 1869

Gentlemen

We humbly beg your pardon for taking the liberty of writing to you but we hope the anxious feelings of unhappy Mothers will excuse us and we beg to state that we have sent three letters to the Guardians requesting permission to visit our Children and there has been no notice taken of them and as there are some of us Mothers not seen our Children for the term of 2 years we humbly hope you will take it into your kind consideration to allow us to visit our Children at stated periods and by so doing you will greatly oblige your humble Servants the anxious

Mothers

Source C - Transcript

Circumtext

“?Inform the Gns. of the tenor of this letter & enquire what arrangements are made for permitting the parents of Children in the W.H. to visit their children <out with> the Leytonstone or the Mitcham Schools
[***]
July 21 /69 “

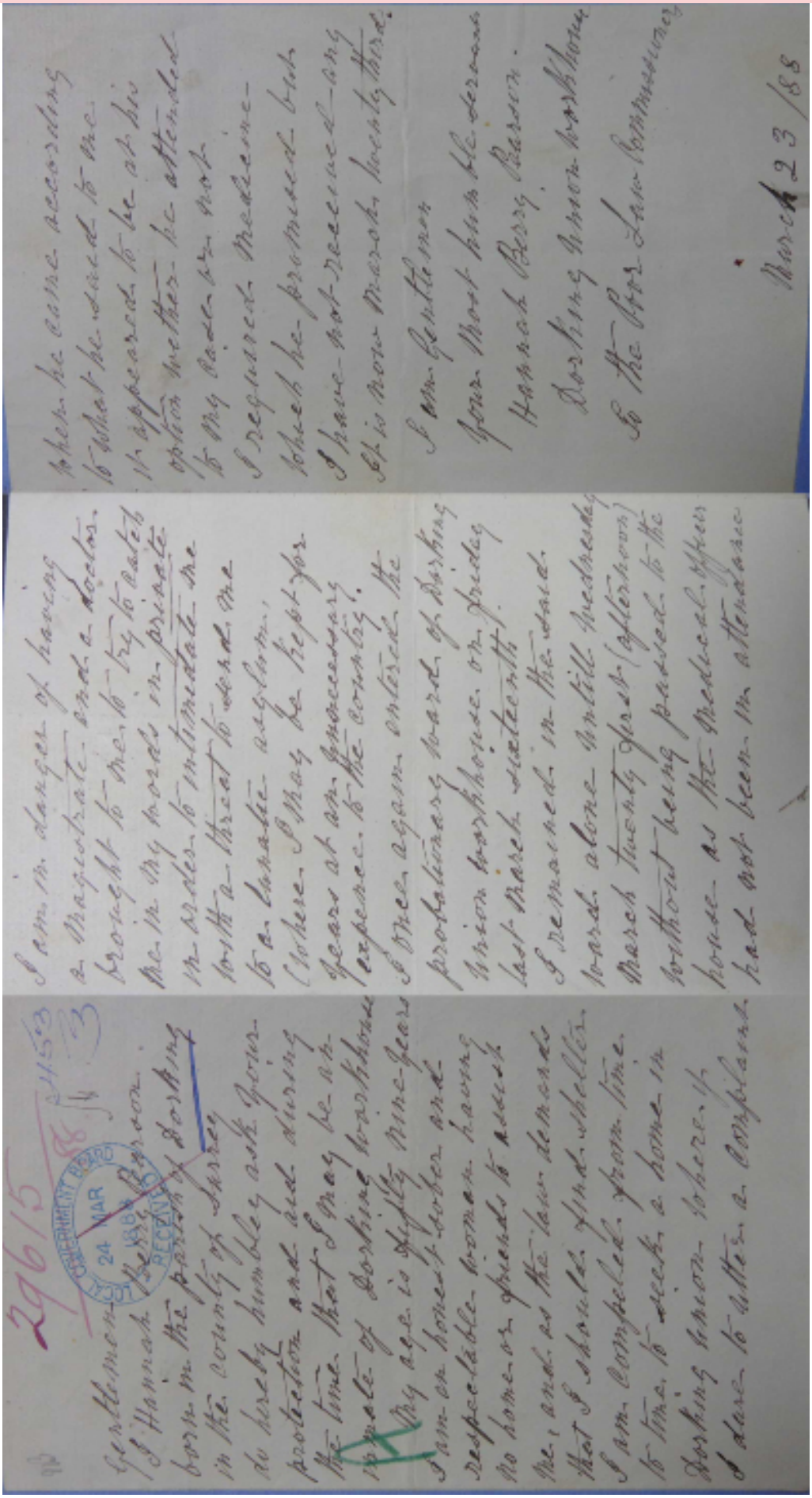
Text

“Bethnal Green
Workhouse
July 16th 1869

Gentlemen
We humbly beg your pardon for taking the liberty of writing to you but we hope the anxious feelings of unhappy Mothers will excuse us and we beg to state that we have sent three letters to the Gaurdians requesting permission to visit our Children and there has been no notice taken of them and as there are some of us mother’s not seen our Children for the turn of 2 years we humbly hope you will take it into your kind consideration to allow us to visit our Children at stated periods and by so doing you will greatly oblige your humble servants the anxious
Mothers”

Source D

Catalogue Ref: MH12/12231, 29615/1888



29615

GOVERNMENT BOARD
24 MAR 1888
RECEIVED

Gentlemen,

I am in danger of having my Mother taken and placed in a Workhouse. I brought her to me to live to prevent the necessity of her being placed in a Workhouse. In my house in private I am able to maintain me. I am in fear of her being taken away from me. I am a Married Woman living in the County of Surrey. I am in good health and able to work for her support and that of myself. My husband is a Porter. The time that I may be absent from home I am afraid my Mother will be taken away. I am a respectable woman having no Homes or friends to assist me, and the law demands that I should find shelter. I am compelled from time to time to seek a home in Working Union to keep a roof over her head. When he came according to what he stated to me he appeared to be an honest mother. He attended to my Father and I respected Medicine which he prescribed both. I have not received any fees in return. Hoping to hear from the Board.

I am Gentlemen
Your Most Humble Servant
Hannah Berry Parson.

Dorking Union Workhouse

To the Poor Law Commissioners

March 23 188

Source D - Transcript

Circumtext
“Mr I. Fu[st]
? Send copy to Gdns for observations especially with reference to her statement that she was kept in the Receiving Ward from the 16th to the 21st instant and did not see the M.O during that time.
26 Mar 88
.-----coneur.
.-----ne are F.P.
.-----ing to Hannah [Pear]son’s complaint in 1886
H.J.Fj
27 . Mar. 1888
.-----
.----- 3 88
See 75749/86 annexed [BJ] 3/4/88
Proceed as suggested in minute of 26 March.
E.[U].W.
3 April 88”

Text

“Gentlemen

I Hannah Berry Pearson born in the parish of Dorking in the county of Surrey do hereby humbley ask your protection and aid during the time that I may be an inmate of Dorking workhouse.
My age is fifty nine years I am an honest sober and respectable woman having no home or friends to assist me, and as the law demands that I should find shelter I am compeled from time to time to seek a home in Dorking Union where if I dare to utter a complaint I am in danger of having a Magistrate and a doctor brought to me to try to catch me in my words in private in order to intimidate me with a threat to send me to a lunatic asylum, (where I may be kept for years at an unnecessary expence to the country. I once again entered the probationary ward of Dorking Union Workhouse on friday last March sixteenth I remained in the said ward alone untill Wednesday March twenty first (afternoon) without being passed to the house as the medical officer had not been in attendance when he came according to what he said to me it appeared to be at his option wether he attended to my case or not
I required medicine which he promised but I have not received any
It is now March twenty third.

I am Gentlemen
Your most humble servant
Hannah Berry Pearson.
Dorking Union Workhouse
To the Poor Law Commissioners
March 23/88”

Source E

Catalogue Ref: MH12/14409, 5630/1869

5630/09 547

March Street
Doughty Place, Groves
York. 27 January 1869

POOR LAW BOARD
JAN 28
1869.
RECEIVED

I beg to lay before you the following particulars of my case, and should be much obliged by your causing enquiries to be made into the circumstances, and taking such other steps as you may think necessary, and by your advising me as to how I am now to obtain relief.

I am upwards of 60 years of age, and very much reduced in circumstances, and though I applied many times to the Poor Law Board at York for out door relief they refused to grant it me, saying I must go into the Workhouse. & I accordingly went there, but the treatment I received whilst there, compelled me to leave, as suffering as I do, I was afraid the treatment would bring upon me that dread disease, & I therefore left & I am now utterly destitute.

Whilst in the Workhouse I was subjected to a great deal of annoyance as the language of the other Inmates towards me was most indecent & abusive, & I was struck by one of them on one occasion & tho' I complained to the Master I got no relief from the annoyance & in fact he himself behaved very ill towards me.

Seeing that I am quite destitute your early reply will greatly oblige.

Your most obedient & respectful Servant

Matilda Fowler

The Secy of
The Poor Law Board
White Hall Place
London.

Source E - Transcript

Circumtext

“The Secy of The Poor Law Board White Hall Place London.
1. Ack and send U. A.
2. Send copy to Guardians for observations
.--- 29 Jany/69”

Text

“March Street
Doughty place, Groves
York 27 Jany 1869
Sir
I beg to lay before you the following particulars of my case, and should be much obliged by your causing enquiries to be made into the circumstances, and taking such other steps as you may think necessary, and by your advising me as to how I am now to obtain relief.
I am upwards of 61 years of age, and very much reduced in circumstances, and though I applied many times to the Poor Law Board at York for out Door Relief they refused to grant it me, saying I must go into the Workhouse & I accordingly went there, but the treatment I received whilst there, compelled me to leave, as suffering as I do, I was afraid the treatment would bring upon an Heart Desease, & I therefore left & I am now utterly destitute.
Whilst in the Workhouse I was subjected to a great deal of annoyance a<nd>
the Language of the other Inmates towards me was most indecent & abusive, & I was struck by one of them on one occasion & tho’ I complained to the Master I could get no relief from the annoyance & in fact he himself behaved very ill towards me.
Seeing that I am quite destitute your early reply will greatly oblige.
Your most obedient & respectful Servant
Matilda Fowler”

Source F

Catalogue Ref: MH12/14736, 26197/1866

563
70

POOR LAW BOARD JUN 22 1866 RECEIVED

Duffield Stones Derby
21st June 1866.

26197
00

My Lords and Gentlemen,

On the 7th instant when visiting the Bradford (Yorkshire) Workhouse I observed a woman named Susannah Bower in the Female Lunatic Ward with severe bruises on her arms. Upon enquiry I found she had been admitted to the Workhouse four days previously, and that it had been twice found necessary to restrain her from doing injury to herself by placing her in a straight jacket, and as after examining the Nurse, Medical Officer, and Master of the Workhouse, I was unable to satisfy myself that these bruises were all upon her person previously to her admission, as stated by the Master, or that no unnecessary violence had been used in restraining her, I wrote to Mr Darlington requesting him to bring the matter under the notice of the Guardians, and to cause an enquiry to be made of the Relieving Officer and relatives of the patient by whom she was brought to the Workhouse as to the condition in which she was previous to her admission. —

I at the same time pointed out how undesirable it was that a person in her state, obviously requiring restraint at the time of her admission, should be detained in a Workhouse for upwards of four days, as altho' a Certificate for her removal to the Asylum had been signed by the Medical Officer previous to my visit she could not be removed before the next day at soonest, - when in point of fact she was removed to Haydock Lodge Asylum there being no room for her at Wakefield, - and I urged upon the Guardians the propriety of appointing additional paid Nurses both in the Lunatic Wards & at the Hospital so that there might be at least one paid Night Nurse always on duty in each. —

I at the same time drew their attention to the impropriety of the Master of the Workhouse employing an imbecile Male pauper to assist the women in the Laundry and Washhouse.

To this letter I have received a reply from Mr Darlington, of which the annexed is a copy, which appears to me satisfactory, as I can place the most entire confidence in Mr Darlington, who would I am sure have told me if he had not been satisfied with the enquiry thus instituted. —

I have written to thank the Guardians for the attention they have paid to the several matters I brought under their notice, and if the Board desire to see the Evidence taken by the Visiting Committee in the case of Susannah Bower, perhaps they will ask for a copy of it, otherwise I think no further notice need be taken of the matter, which however I have thought it right to bring to the knowledge of the Board. —

I have the honor to be,
My Lords and Gentlemen,
Your obedient Servant.
W Cornish
Poor Law Inspector.

Poor Law Board
Whitehall
London.

Rathy
25 June 66

Source F - Transcript

CIRCUMTEXT:
Poor Law Board, Whitehall, London
+ [NP]+ Putley +initials 25 June 66

TEXT:

Duffield House, Derby

My Lords and Gentlemen,

On the 7th instant when visiting the Bradford (Yorkshire) Workhouse I observed a woman named Susannah Bower in the female Lunatic Ward with severe bruises on her arms. Upon enquiring I found she been admitted to the workhouse four days previously and that it had been twice found necessary to restrain her from doing injury to herself by placing her in a straight jacket, and ^as^ after examining the Nurse, Medical Officer, and Master of the Workhouse, I was unable to satisfy that these bruises were all upon her person previously to her admission, as stated by the Master, or that no unnecessary violence had been used in restraining her, I wrote to Mr Darlington requesting him to bring the matter under the notice of the Guardians, and to cause an enquiry to be made of the Relieving Officer and relatives of the patient by whom she was brought to the Workhouse as to the condition in which she was previous to her admission -

I at the same time pointed out how undesirable it was that a person in her state, obviously requiring restraint at the time of admission, would be detained in a workhouse for upwards of four days, as altho' a Certificate for her removal to the Asylum had been signed by the Medical Officer previous to my visit she could not be removed before the next day at soonest, when in point of fact she was removed to Haydock Lodge Asylum then being no room for her at Wakefield, and I urged upon the Guardians the propriety of appointing additional paid Nurses both in the Lunatic Wards & at Hospital so that there might be at least one paid Night Nurse always on duty in each. –

I at the same time drew their attention to the impropriety of the Master of the Workhouse employing an imbecile Male pauper to assist the women in the Laundry and Washhouse.

To this letter I have received a reply from Mr Darlington, of which annexed is a copy, which appears to me satisfactory, as I can place the most entire confidence in Mr Darlington, who would I am sure have told one if he had not been satisfied with the enquiry thus instituted –

I have written to thank the guardians for the attention they have paid to the several matters I brought under their notice, and if the Board desire to see the Evidence taken by the visiting committee in the case of Susannah Power, perhaps they will ask for a copy of it, otherwise I think further notice need not be taken of this matter, which however I have thought it right to bring to the knowledge of the Board –

I have the honor to be,
My Lords and Gentleman,
Your Obedient Servant,
U Corbett
Poor Law Inspector

Source G

Catalogue Ref: MH12/7697, 35010/1882

Poplar

Royal Courts of Justice
April 3rd 1882

35010/82

RECEIVED 4 APR 1882 HOME GOVERNMENT BRANCH

My Lords – Permit me to draw your attention to the Workhouses – On Saturday April 1st I left the Poplar Workhouse – Female Lunatic Department after a wretched sojourn there of 12 days – I have not to complain of the Doctor – or other Officials they did what they could for me, & sympathised – but what comfort can a poor lady have who is suffering from an internal strain, in a place where the beds are so narrow – that it hard that one cannot even turn without falling out, as was my case the second night – The food is very well for workhouse fare – but, too coarse for me to digest. & the other patients cried & begged to go home – most miserable company –

This Lunatic Ward is considered a trial place to ascertain if persons are "Lunatics" – It is a means for relations to get out of the way all those who are in their way – or who from any cause are disposed – They thrust in anyone who is low spirited – nervous. or excited, affirming they persons are suffering from "delusions" or sick "to commit suicide" – These unfortunate beings, who have simply the aches & pains common to human nature are detained whether willing or unwilling, & conveyed to a Lunatic Asylum & put away" without any one's knowledge. This, as more than one patient said to me – enough to drive them mad – They sit still from morning to night & count the hours & cry – we all drink one morning. May I ask – if this is a free country what right have such institutions to exist? –

What right have a free nation of members of be considered "lunatics" because they do not all think – feel – & do alike –

What right have persons to be told they have "delusions" simply because they cannot prove all they assert –

What right have persons to make their fellow creatures lives harder & bitterer than they even are? –

I was told that at the regular Lunatic Asylums they beat the patients with wet cloths – so as to leave no mark –

The more one sees of the Lunatic institutions – the more one feels what kind creatures they naturally are –

It ought to be made criminal for any one to be called a "Lunatic" –

In many cases they give the patient something to excite or upset them & then say they are mad –

I have the honour to remain Your humble servant
Catherine Monckton Mullerman –

If I may also observe that no patients are admitted at all hours of the night – the Wards are never quiet – ought they to be admitted after 10 Pm? –

Mr Morley
24 Putney
SW
6 April 82.

April 9/82

Putney
10 April 82

Source G - Transcript

"Royal Courts of Justice
April 3d 1882

My Lords –
Permit me to draw your attention to the Workhouses – On Saturday April 1st I left the Poplar Workhouse – Female Lunatic Department after a wretched sojourn there of 12 days – I have not to complain of the Doctor – or other officials they did what they could for me & sympathised – but what comfort can a poor lady who is suffering from an internal strain, in a place where the beds are so narrow, short & hard that one cannot lie in even turn without falling out, as was my case the second night – The food was is very well for workhouse fare, but was too coarse for me to digest, & the other patients cried & begged to go home – most miserable company –
This Lunatic Ward is considered a trial place to ascertain if persons are "Lunatics" – It is a means of for relations to get out of the way all those who are in their way – or who from any cause are do disposed – They thrust in any one who is low spirited – nervous, or excited, affirming these persons are suffering from "delusions" or wish "to commit suicide" – These unfortunate beings who have simply the aches & pains common to human nature are detained whether willing or unwilling, & can be conveyed to a Lunatic Asylum & "put away" without any one's knowledge –
It is, as more than one patient said to me – enough to drive them mad – They sit still from morning to night & count the hours & cry – we all cried one morning.
May I ask (if this is a free country) what right have such institutions to exist?
What right have ^members of^ a free nation to be considered "lunatics" because they do not all think – feel - & do alike
- What right have persons to be told they have "delusions" simply because they cannot prove all they assert?
- What right have persons to ma<ke> their fellow creatures lives harder and bitterer than they already are?
- I was told that at the regular Lunatic Asylums they beat the Patients with wet cloths – so as to leave no mark
- The more one sees of the English nations – the more one feels what brutal creatures they naturally are
- It ought to be made criminal for any one to be called a "Lunatic"
- In many cases they give the patient something to excite or upset them & then say they are mad
- I have the honr
to remain yr. humble servant
Catherine Bonchin Phillimon

I must also observe that as Patients are admitted all hours of the night – the Wards are never quiet – ought they to be admitted after 10pm?"