

## **THE WORKHOUSE – A talk by Rosemary Church**

### **Introduction**

A brief outline of why workhouses came into being.

Before the Reformation and the abolishment of the monasteries in 1536 monks gave food and shelter to people who wandered around or became destitute. However, with the loss of the monasteries people had nowhere to go and the parishes found that they had to look after these unfortunate folk. This of course cost money and the better off people resented having to fork out for every person who was destitute.

In 1601 & 1640 Poor Laws had been brought in to deal with the rising tide of poor in England and Wales. The poor were entitled to pass from one parish to another and therefore tried to settle themselves in those parishes where there was the best stock, largest commons or waste to build cottages and the most woods for them to burn and destroy. When they had consumed it they move on to another parish and at last become rogues and vagabonds. Therefore, the Act of Settlement of 1662 was enacted. This stated that any person coming to settle in a parish in a house under a yearly value of £10 when, or if it seemed likely that they would become a burden to the parish, they could be removed by order of 2 justices, back to their own parish. This settlement in a parish could be gained by birth, as an householder, an apprentice or as a servant. A married woman would gain her husband's settlement. This Act set the laws for settlement for over 200 years although there were further amendments. By 1691 another act defined how to acquire a legal settlement by: - serving in a parish office; paying poor rates, being bound by indenture to a parishioner; serving a complete year's hiring as a servant.

To determine settlement a deposition on oath called an examination was made by the pauper before 2 justices. Every parish had a right to appeal against a pauper's settlement rights, and there were many of them!

From 1697 a pauper could move to another parish for work as long as they had a settlement certificate from their legal parish saying that the parish would take them back if they fell on hard times.

Legitimate children (a birth more than a month after marriage) took their father's settlement or their mother's if she was a widow. Bastards were settled in their parish of birth until in 1744 they took their mother's settlement.

One unlawful consequence of this was that parish officers tried to persuade or force a marriage with a single or widowed woman who became pregnant, especially if the man was from another parish. This would mean that the woman and child would have legal settlement in the man's parish and the burden of relieving them would not be on the parish poor rate. The man's options were limited to marrying or going to jail. In any case if the accusation of siring an illegitimate child was proved to the justices' satisfaction, he would have to pay for the child's upkeep until it was old enough to be apprenticed by the parish.

Vagrants who wandered from parish to parish had been a problem for centuries and various vagrancy laws had been enacted to deal with this problem. Punishments for these vagrants were extremely severe, ranging from whipping for the 1<sup>st</sup> offence, loss of ears for the 2<sup>nd</sup>, and hanging for the 3<sup>rd</sup>. In 1598 a law

stated that vagrants from the age of 7 years were to be whipped and sent back to their place of birth where they had lived for a year or more, and were to be handed from constable to constable along the way and to carry a testimonial signed by a justice. Two further Acts in 1740 and 1734 added to the requirements.

Two examples of these vagrants are: -

*1742 Christopher How, apprehended in St Philip & Jacob, Bristol. Last legal settlement Faringdon, Berkshire. From the House of Correction to Faringdon*  
*1779 Louisa Martin, widow, & her daughter Ann aged 4 years, apprehended Faringdon, Berks through Highworth & Shaftesbury to Sherborne, Dorset*

In 1795 another Act stated that the removal of a sick person might be suspended until they were fit to travel and in 1809 another Act extended this to the family of the sick person.

In 1834 the Poor Law Amendment Act altered the system of Poor Relief completely and parishes were grouped together in Unions. Settlement by hiring and service and serving as a parish officer was abolished. The original parish of settlement was liable for the cost of relief to the pauper.

Because of the migration of the work force many unions had agreements with other Poor Law Unions to relieve many of those applying for assistance and not remove them. The unions of origin agreed to pay the cost to the relieving union. This saved on the cost of removing the pauper back to his parish of settlement.

### **Faringdon Workhouse**

Faringdon had a workhouse from around 1725. A report notes in 1732 that *this place begins to answer the ends of its being first set up, the poor having a much more comfortable subsistence and the parish relieved of its former burden. In general, we have reason to hope the benefits of it will more and more appear every year, both to the poor and to ourselves.* Where this was I haven't been able to find out.

### **A poem giving a description of a parish workhouse by George Crabb in 1783**

*Thus groan the old, till, by disease opprest  
 They taste the final woe, and then they rest  
 Theirs is yon House that holds the parish poor  
 Whose walls of mud scarce bear the broken door  
 There, where the putrid vapours flagging play  
 And the dull wheel hums doleful through the day  
 There children dwell who know no parents' care  
 Parents, who know no children's love, dwell there  
 Heart broken matrons on their joyless bed  
 Forsaken wives, and mothers never wed  
 Dejected widows with unheeded tears  
 And crippled age with more than childhood fears  
 The lame, the blind, and far happier they  
 The mopping idiot, and the madman gay*

### **The Faringdon House of Industry**

In 1800 the Faringdon Poor House Committee met for the first time to discuss the prospects of *'either hiring or purchasing a House for the maintenance and employment of the Poor'*.

The building was erected by John Fidel in Back Lane, later named Union Street, now Ferndale Street, to accommodate 450 inmates.

It was known locally as the 'Institution' and it continued in that capacity until 1933 when it was converted into flats known as Ferndale Place. In the 1970's the building finally made way for a housing development known as Lansdown Road and Brackendale Sheltered Housing.

On 9<sup>th</sup> April 1817 at a meeting in the newly erected building Edward Loveden-Loveden, and John Fidel were elected as Visitors to the Poor. George Simmons and Thomas Bye were appointed Governors plus two appointed by the magistrates. Richard Carter, Joseph Whipp, John Davis, William Higgins, Richard Parrott, John Stephenson, Henry Tyler, Thomas Belcher, James Tinson and John Fidel were all recommended to the magistrates for consideration for the posts. George Mantell was appointed as surgeon and apothecary at 30 guineas a year, the sum included compensation for his attendance on women lying in with children. The Matron to be Maria Shrimpton at a salary of £18 per year.

### **The Poor Law Union Workhouse**

Assistant Poor Law Commissioner Edward Gulson helped with the setting up of the new Faringdon Poor Law Union and he gave this report in 1835.

*I found there a large workhouse, already erected, capable of holding 300 persons. It belonged exclusively to Faringdon and contained 63 inmates. Order and regularity were kept up to a high degree. The classification of inmates and the separation of the sexes have been rigidly enforced. The able-bodied paupers were employed in digging stone out of a pit which was situated on a piece of land next to the workhouse. I united 29 parishes under the Union, many of which were highly pauperized.*

### **Slide**

*'The Union covered the following parishes in Berkshire, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire:- Ashbury, Baulking, Bourton, Buckland, Buscot, Charney, Coleshill, Compton Beauchamp, Great Coxwell, Little Coxwell, Eaton Hastings, Great Faringdon, Little Faringdon, Fernham, Grafton, Hatford, Hinton Waldrist, Kelmscott, Kingston Lisle, Langford, Lechlade, Longcot, Longworth, Pusey, Radcot, Shellingford, Shrivenham, Stanford, Uffington, and Watchfield. Although the interior arrangements of the workhouse were not such as to render the management so efficient as it will be when the alterations now in progress are completed, they are sufficient to make it immediately available for the paupers of the whole union. All outdoor relief to able bodied labourers is discontinued. The workhouse now contains 74 inmates from the whole union. Some of these only remained in the workhouse from between 1 to 4 days, having found means of providing for themselves. Thus were 85 men with their families at once relieved from the degradation of pauperism and taught that they could honestly and independently support themselves and their families by their industry.*

The workhouse was built to accommodate 400 persons of both sexes. In 1847, however, there were only 241 inmates. It contained many rooms or wards, with separate dormitories for men, women, boys and girls, and all had barred windows to prevent anything being taken in or out of the wards. It had been found that inmates would beg for food and money from passers-by, and the Governors considered this to be intolerable.

There was a receiving room, strong room, dining room, meat room and a separate washroom with a lean-to scullery. By 1850 a bakehouse was built, and there was a small hospital after 1870. By 1880 the hospital had been extended and in 1888 eight fever cases were admitted to it from outside the Workhouse, since it was the only place in Faringdon that could take such cases. (The Cottage Hospital was opened in 1892).

Outside the house, but within the eight-foot wall surrounding it, were two separate yards. One was for the able-bodied, and contained stone which was to be broken for repair work. Later the breaking of stone was carried on at the roadside where the material was required, also for the handling railway sleepers which were purchased from the G.W.R., collected from the station and sawn by hand, split and tied into bundles to be sold as kindling. A man used to take a large load on a regular tour of the vicinity selling the bundles for 2d each. The other yard was for the children and aged paupers and contained a small mill '*for dressing, spinning and winding of hemp*'. This yard was later also used for drying laundry taken in by the women.

At first the staff of the Poor Law Union Workhouse consisted of a Matron, teacher, porter and a mistress of spinning, later on it also included a Master and a nurse. A full-time clerk and a chaplain who was the vicar of Faringdon Parish, were also on the payroll. Discipline, as laid down by a Rulebook which the Poor Law Commission sent to Faringdon in 1835, was maintained rigorously.

#### **Census 1841**

POTTOW John, 65, Master  
 POTTOW Ann, 45, Matron  
 POTTOW Ann, 20  
 POTTOW Jane, 20  
 POTTOW Hannah, Schoolmistress  
 POTTOW Mary, 10  
 NICHOLLS Ann, 8  
 KITTOW John Charles, 20, Porter  
 ABSALOM George, 10  
 ALDER Thomas, 85, ag lab  
 BASSON Alice, 4  
 BEAVIS Ann, 45, ag lab  
 BEAVIS Daniel, 70 ag lab  
 BEAVIS Mary, 20, ag lab; BEAVIS Emma, 2  
 BECKINGHAM Thomas, 13  
 BELCHER Mary, 20; BELCHER Emila, 3  
 BEVE Thomas, 30, railroad lab, Ireland  
 BLAGROVE John, 34 ag lab

BLOWING Mary, 60, ag lab  
 BOOTS Rachel, 10  
 BOWLER Mary, 15 ag lab  
 BRADSHAW William, 74, carpenter  
 BROOKS William, 14; BROOKS Mary Ann, 14  
 BROWN Jane, 80, ag lab  
 BUTLER Henry, 8; BUTLER George, 5  
 CARTER John, 30, ag lab; CARTER Hannah, 25, ag lab; CARTER William, 4;  
     CARTER Elizabeth, 2; CARTER Thomas, 1  
 CARVER Richard, 20, ag lab  
 CHANDLER John, 75, ag lab  
 CHILD Samuel, 70 servant  
 CHURCH Mary Ann, 13; CHURCH James, 10  
 COLLIER Thomas, 60, ag lab  
 COLLINS Eliza, 18; COLLINS Matilda, 10  
 CONSTABLE Catherine, 12; CONSTABLE Clarice, 10  
 CURTIS Sarah, 40 ag lab; CURTIS James, 1  
 DAVIS Henry, 10  
 EMBLING William, 50 ag lab  
 EVANS Richard, 55, ag lab  
 FISHER Amos, 8  
 FORD Sarah, 65  
 FULBROOK John, 70, ag lab  
 GARDNER Margaret, 80, ag lab  
 GEARING John, 35, ag lab; GEARING Eliza, 30; GEARING Thomas, 6;  
     GEARING Fanny, 10; GEARING Louisa, 4; GEARING Reuben, 2  
 HAINES William, 60, ag lab  
 HAINES? Sophia, 50  
 HALE John, 10; HALE Alice, 10  
 HERBERT Ann, 60  
 HERBERT Charlotte, 55  
 HICKS Eliza, 25, ag lab; HICKS Elizabeth, 3; HICKS William, 1  
 HIGGONS Jane, 10; HIGGONS Edwin, 5; HIGGONS W, 3  
 JENNINGS John, 35, ag lab  
 JOHNSON Edward, 5  
 JONES John, 20 ag lab  
 LAMBOURN William, 64 ag lab; LAMBOURN Priscilla, 65 ag lab  
 LAWRENCE John, 30, ag lab; LAWRENCE Ann, 30; LAWRENCE Thomas, 10;  
     LAWRENCE Elizabeth, 8; LAWRENCE Benjamin, 5; LAWRENCE  
     Joseph, 2  
 LEAKER Sarah, 80, ag lab  
 LEGG Richard, 50 ag lab  
 LOVEGROVE John, 35, ag lab  
 LUKER George, 15, ag lab  
 LUKER Susannah, 65 ag lab  
 MACCABEE Esther, 15, ag lab

MATTHEWS Richard, 70, ret'd farmer  
 MATTINGLY Mary, 25  
 MILES Mary, 85  
 MONK Elizabeth, 60 needlewoman  
 MOORING Ann, 65, ag lab  
 MORSE Charlotte, 25, ag lab; MORSE Jane, 1  
 MULCOCK Joseph, 10  
 NEWMAN Rachel, 75, ag lab  
 NEWPORT Robert, 10  
 NICHOLLS Jane, 75 ag lab  
 NICHOLLS Martha, 15  
 NICHOLLS Mary, 20, ag lab; NICHOLLS Emila, 2  
 PAGE Hannah, 50, ag lab; PAGE Ann, 15; PAGE Jonathan, 16  
 PATEY Winifred, 10; PATEY Thomas, 12  
 PENDEL Catherine, 55, ag lab; PENDEL Mary, 5  
 PLUMMER Sarah, 70  
 PULLEN Mary, 25 ag lab  
 PUZEY Sarah, 30, ag lab; PUZEY Philip, 8; PUZEY Philis, 7 PUZEY Richard, 3;  
 PUZEY Albert, 1  
 RIDGE Elizabeth, 50, ag lab  
 ROBINSON Ann, 11; ROBINSON William, 10 ROBINSON Edwin, 7  
 ROBINSON Jane, 4  
 SANSBURY William, 5; SANSBURY Samuel, 4  
 SCRIVEN William, 85, ag lab  
 SMART Hannah, 80  
 SMITH Charles, 10  
 SMITH Mary, 75, ag lab  
 STALLARD Harriett, 50  
 STEVENS William, 60, ag lab  
 STIMPSON Esther, 14; STIMPSON William, 10; STIMPSON George, 8  
 TAYLOR Hannah Maria, 8  
 TEMPLE Simon, 75, ag lab  
 TINSON Elizabeth, 75, nurse  
 TOVEY Richard, 75, ag lab  
 TOWNSEND Elizabeth, 78 ag lab  
 TRINDER William, 65 ag lab  
 TUCK Charlotte, 5  
 TUCKER John, 45 ag lab  
 WALKER Elizabeth, 20 servant  
 WALKER James, 40, ag lab; WALKER Ann, 13, ag lab; WALKER Susannah, 8,  
 ag lab; WALKER Ellen, 5  
 WALKER Sarah, 18, servant  
 WALKER William, 85, shoemaker  
 WARMAN Maria, 30  
 WISEMAN John, 60 ag lab

In 1841 the Matron was Ann Pottow, in 1854 Marianne Sporle, in 1881 Emma Jefferies and in 1915 Mrs Goswell. Masters have included John Pottow in 1841, Cornelius Sporle in 1854 and James Jefferies in 1881. The latter was born in Faringdon. The children were cared for by a Foster Mother and Father and were only allowed to see their parents on a Sunday at the compulsory Chapel services and in the afternoon in the dining room.

Entry was by the porter's gate where paupers were searched for forbidden items such as tobacco and alcohol. They entered a receiving ward for a medical examination where they would be classified able bodied or infirm and segregated into separate wards for men, women, boys and girls. Their clothes were taken away to be fumigated and stored for when they left. They would be given a close hair crop and a bath and clothed in the workhouse garments. A weekly bath was the rule, often to the disgust of the inmates.

Workhouse rules were severe and had to be obeyed without question. Everyone had to know their place. Silence was observed especially during mealtimes and in chapel. Prayers were said before breakfast and after supper. Names were called over twice a day, followed by an inspection to see that everyone was in a clean and proper state. Of course, some inmates rebelled which resulted in punishments meted out in a stern manner, and further bad behaviour would be dealt with severely by local magistrates which could mean a spell in the local jail with hard labour.

Babies were baptized at the workhouse or at the local church. Deaths were frequent in the early days especially of new-born babies.

There was an emphasis on cleanliness as there was a dread of contagious diseases occurring and spreading like wildfire in the workhouse.

Everyone, including the elderly and infirm, was put to work for many hours a day. Occupations were those of stone breaking, oakum picking, corn grinding, bone crushing and firewood chopping.

In 1837 a new regulation was introduced which required the workhouse to provide food and a night's shelter to be given to a destitute person i.e. vagrant, as the new institutions had made no provision for these 'casual wards'.

In one meeting in 1837 it was resolved '*that on a second admission of paupers of disorderly conduct they should be set to hard work and to the performance of those menial offices which are the most unpleasant and laborious*'. Also, paupers '*of a refractory nature*' were sometimes placed on bread and water diets.

**Poem written by James Withers Reynolds to his sister in 1846, he was a shoemaker, who, with his family were inmates in a workhouse in Cambridgeshire.**

*Since I cannot, dear sister, with you hold communion  
I'll give you a sketch of our life in the union  
But how to begin I don't know, I declare*

*Let me see: well, the first is our grand bill of fare  
 We've skilly for breakfast, at night bread and cheese  
 And we eat it and then go to bed if you please  
 Two days in the week we have puddings for dinner  
 And two we have broth, so like water but thinner  
 Two, meat and potatoes, of this none to spare  
 One day, bread and cheese, and this is our fare*

*And now then my clothes I will try to portray  
 They're made of coarse cloth and the colour is grey  
 My jacket and waistcoat don't fit me at all  
 My shirt is too short, or I am too tall  
 My shoes are not pairs, though of course I have two  
 They are down at heel and my stockings are blue  
 A sort of Scotch bonnet we wear on our heads  
 And I sleep in a room where there are just fourteen beds  
 Some are sleeping, some are snoring, some talking, some playing  
 Some fighting, some swearing, but very few praying*

*Here are nine at a time who work on the mill  
 We take it in turns so it never stands still  
 A half hour each gang, so 'tis not very hard  
 And when we are off we can walk the yard*

*I sometimes look up at the bit of blue sky  
 High over my head, with a tear in my eye  
 Surrounded by walls that are too high to climb  
 Confined like a felon without any crime  
 Not a field, nor a house, nor a hedge can I see  
 Not a plant, not a flower, nor a bush, nor a tree  
 But I'm getting, I find, too pathetic by half  
 And my object was only to cause you to laugh  
 So my love to yourself, your husband and daughter  
 I'll drink to your health with a tin of cold water  
 Of course, we've no wine, not porter, nor beer  
 So you see that we all are teetotallers here.*

In general, the life of the inmates was intended to be most unpleasant. The Poor Law System was devised to deter people with severe financial problems from claiming relief. The Victorian Age was one in which it was felt that anyone who was prepared to work hard would be able to earn a comfortable living. It took a long time for people to realise that the typical inmates of the Workhouse were simply not able to earn a reasonable living. The aged, the very young and the physically and mentally handicapped obviously could not survive without assistance even if they wanted to. If their families did not look after them they had no choice but to enter the Workhouse.



Elementary education had to be provided on the premises and they had to learn reading, writing and arithmetic. There were two separate units, one for boys and one for girls. Model rules issued in 1835 demanded that workhouse children receive at least 3 hours a day instruction in reading, writing and religion, "and such other instructions shall be imparted to them as are calculated to train them into habits of usefulness, industry and virtue". More detailed guidance issued in 1837 stressed the aim of training the children for work. In 1847 the Poor Law Board increased the teaching requirement to 4 hours a day

The workhouse had two separate schools, one for boys under a schoolmaster, the other for girls under a schoolmistress. From 1846 the salaries of teachers were centrally funded, and they were assessed by one of 5 inspectors of Poor Law schools, who reported to the Committee of the Privy Council on Education.

### **Love and education in a time of cholera: St Matts' first student's first destination<sup>1</sup>**

As the family tree on the back of a University of the West of England award ceremony programme shows, one of the predecessors of the present University and of its Faculty of Education was the College of St Matthias, which commenced operations at Fishponds in 1853.

St Matthias was founded as a Church of England training school for elementary school teachers. The dioceses of Oxford and of Gloucester and Bristol agreed that Oxford would provide a training school for men, and Gloucester and Bristol one for women, each to be open to students from both dioceses.<sup>2</sup>

Until 1853 there was no diocesan training school for women in the Gloucester and Bristol diocese; apart from the National Society's Diocesan Schools in Lewin's Mead, Bristol, which taught and trained in the strict monitorial method advocated by Dr Bell, the nearest training places were at Brighton and Llandaff, the latter non-residential.<sup>3</sup> Oxford diocese however had two small training schools: one for men at Summertown, now a suburb of north Oxford;<sup>4</sup> and one for women founded in 1840 in 3 Prospect Terrace, Reading<sup>5</sup> (now 241 Oxford Road, converted into flats opposite the Jet petrol station). In 1845 the women's establishment moved to Kidlington, a village a few miles north of Oxford.<sup>6</sup>

The committee appointed to build the Gloucester and Bristol training school chose a site at Fishponds. The Oxford establishment was built at Culham (later, Culham College of Education but now the premises of The European School), whereupon the Summertown school was closed and the men students moved to Culham. Once St Matthias was nearly built, the 5 women students at Kidlington transferred to Fishponds.

The first student when the training school opened on 10 September 1853 was Julia Puce Long.<sup>7</sup> Her surname in the St Matthias Admissions Register is obscured by over writing, but she can be identified because the register says where she came from, and what her father's occupation was. Julia's date of birth was first entered in the Admissions Register as 15 September 1837. It was later

inked over as 1838. If that was correct (as is suggested by the 1841 census enumerator's report <sup>8</sup> which says she was then 3: the 1851 census<sup>9</sup> says she was then 12, which cannot be right), then when she came to St Matts she was not quite 15 years old.

The eldest of 8 children, Julia was the daughter of James Long, the schoolmaster of the National Society's elementary school in Stanford Road, Faringdon, now in Oxfordshire but then in Berkshire.<sup>10</sup> The school building itself is now demolished, but its bell and inscribed stone name plaque are incorporated into The Bell House, a private residence which now occupies the site. The family lived in Stanford Road, and were near neighbours of John Haines, who was clerk to the local workhouse Board of Guardians.<sup>11</sup> Julia had attended Miss Priscilla Clarke's private school<sup>12</sup> in London Street, Faringdon. Miss Clarke, with another teacher and two servants, ran a fairly upmarket establishment boarding a dozen children between the ages of 5 and 14. Most of the boarders came from Faringdon itself and from neighbouring counties, but one came from as far away as Yorkshire.<sup>13</sup> Miss Clarke also took in local day pupils, of whom Julia Long was one. Julia joined the Kidlington training school in October 1852, and moved to Fishponds to complete her training.

Julia stayed only 3 months at St Matthias: the Admissions Register says she left on 4 December 1853, returned to Faringdon, and became mistress of the workhouse school.

Under orders made by the Poor Law Board under section 15 of the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834, elementary education had to be provided on the premises for children of inmates. Model rules issued in 1835 demanded that workhouse children receive at least 3 hours a day instruction in reading, writing and religion, "*and such other instructions shall be imparted to them as are calculated to train them into habits of usefulness, industry and virtue*".<sup>14</sup> More detailed guidance issued in 1837<sup>15</sup> stressed the aim of training the children for work. "*It is therefore recommended that any improved methods of teaching, by which the time of learning is abridged, should be adopted; and that after a competent knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic has been imparted to the children, and so soon as they are capable of going into service, exertions should be made to gain them independent employment*". In 1847 the Poor Law Board increased the teaching requirement to 4 hours a day.<sup>16</sup>

Faringdon Union workhouse was large. Judging from the Board of Guardians' minutes<sup>17</sup> it was efficiently run with firmness but, in the light of values commonly held at that time, not without compassion towards the vulnerable and those in ill-health, whether inmates or employees. Unreliable supplies, Bristol merchants and cholera were but a few of their problems. The workhouse, which had been built about 1805 on land south of what is now Femdale Street, had two separate schools, one for boys under a schoolmaster, the other for girls under a schoolmistress. From 1846 the salaries of teachers were centrally funded, and they were assessed by one of 5 inspectors of Poor Law schools, forerunners of HMIs, who reported to the Committee of the Privy Council on Education, the forerunner of the DFEE.

Faringdon Guardians' approach to teaching quality and standards was by the direct route. On 23 August 1853 they read HMI Ruddock's adverse report on the boys' school. On 30 August they sacked the schoolmaster. Subsequently they told their clerk to include in any reference "that he leaves in consequence of notice from the Board, his management and mode of teaching not being satisfactory," and they later made Mr Haines correct a report to the Poor Law Board that the schoolmaster had resigned.

On 4 October 1853, the Board considered applications from 5 men, including one Benjamin Kirke, aged 21, a butcher's son from Gainsborough. He had trained at Kneller Hall, the West London establishment for training workhouse schoolmasters. He was invited for interview the following week when the other short-listed candidate withdrew on the day. Benjamin Kirke was unanimously appointed, at a salary of £30 a year.

Meanwhile Faringdon Guardians had run into trouble with their schoolmistress appointments. In 1851 they had appointed a Miss Mobbs on 6 months trial, and later confirmed her employment at £20 a year. Early in 1853 Miss Mobbs began to visit a sick relative. In January she had a day's leave, a week in March, and another period in April, by which time her relative was seriously ill. She took more leave in September. On 25 October 1853 she resigned, regretting that her commitments did not allow her to give any notice.

The Guardians decided to advertise the post in the National Society's *Monthly Paper*, and twice in *The Times* and the *Oxford Journal*, and told the workhouse master "*to make the best provision he can for the girls' school*" pending an appointment.

On 8 November 1853, the Guardians considered applications from a Miss Charlotte Gillard (26) from Yorkshire, and an older woman from Guildford. The Guardians decided to appoint Miss Gillard and asked her to come on trial as soon as she could. She arrived the following week.

Miss Gillard insisted on attending church twice a day on Sundays, which meant that she was not there to help supervise the children's dinner. On 6 December 1853, the Guardians told the workhouse master to try to come to some arrangement with her. On 13 December, the master reported that he had been unable to do so. The Board sent her a formal resolution that they could not dispense with her attendance at dinner on Sundays. The Chairman told her it was her duty to attend to the Board's directions and asked her why she had not complied with the Board's instructions. Miss Gillard wrote asking to be allowed to go to church. On 20 December, the Board repeated their previous order: after all, it was nearly Christmas. The following week she resigned.

On 27 December 1853 the Board, which was chaired by the Revd John Francis Cleaver, who will also have been involved in the management of the National Society school at Faringdon, decided to advertise the vacancy in the *Reading Mercury*, the *Oxford Journal* and, for the first time, the *Bristol Mercury*, a Liberal paper. The advert appeared on 31 December.

## FARRINGTON UNION

Wanted, a SCHOOLMISTRESS for the workhouse, at Farrington. She must be fully competent to instruct the Girls in Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, and the principles of the Christian Religion; to superintend their industrial and moral training, and to perform the other duties prescribed by the orders of the Poor-Law Board, and the regulations of the Guardians Board, and separate Apartments in the House will be provided. Salary £20 per annum, with such income (if any) as may be allowed by the Committee of Council on Education.

The last sentence refers to grant in aid of teacher's salary paid from 1849 according to whether the teacher was efficient, competent, probationary or permitted.

On 10 January 1854 the Board considered applications from a Mrs Johnson (50) from Harwell, a Miss Colegrove (20) from Stoke Newington, a Miss Dee (25) from Chipping Sodbury, and "Miss Julia Pruce Long of Faringdon, now in her 17th year." Clearly Julia was still having trouble with her birth date: she was only 15 years 3 months. The Board decided unanimously to shortlist only Miss Long, and asked her to attend the following week, when they appointed her. Her salary was confirmed at £20 a year, "with rations equal to the master of the workhouse." Perhaps they thought she was a bit small for her age.

Julia started work on 24 January 1854. Her salary was a third less than Benjamin Kirke's; at the same time Faringdon British School was paying its schoolmaster £60 a year.

On 23 May 1854, the chaplain reported positively to the Board on both the schools. On 11 July 1854 HMI Ruddock inspected the schools, and "reported very favourably on the Girls' school and that an amendment had taken place in the Boys' school."

Something else may have been afoot. The Guardians' minutes of 12 September 1854 record that they directed the master of the workhouse "*that the Schoolmaster and Schoolmistress must tell the Porter the 'cause of leaving' when they go out.*" Other romances, if that is what it was, have been recorded in poetry, song, drama or the novel: few get minuted.

By November 1855 Benjamin Kirke was applying for jobs elsewhere. On 7 October 1856 he tendered his resignation on appointment to another school. In their testimonial the Board said that "Mr Kirke's general character and conduct during the whole time that he has been schoolmaster of this Union have been unexceptionably good."

The minutes do not record where he went. Perhaps that omission was diplomatic, because the post he took up was that of schoolmaster in the next but one parish of Coleshill, where the radical reformer the Earl of Radnor (Huch, 1977) had established a non-sectarian elementary school (Horn 1978). '*My principal object is to teach the sons of the agricultural labourers of the place reading, writing, plain arithmetic, and bible history and Xtian doctrine. If to this is added the higher reaches of arithmetic, mensuration etc. with geography and*

*popular history, it would be so much the better*'. When the post was advertised in March 1856, Benjamin Kirke put in a late application, so was not successful. In his letter of application Kirke told Radnor that he wanted to move simply to better his condition, but privately that the Workhouse was damaging his health.

Radnor had sacked the previous schoolmaster: *'as the school, I am sorry to say, does not go on quite to my disposition, I should be glad to hear from you that you wish to leave it. Pray mention when you would wish to go. Yours Radnor.'*

From correspondence it is apparent that numbers had fallen from 70 to below 10 (though 15 attended night classes) and that contrary to Radnor's wish that no religion be taught there the schoolmaster had let the local parson in to teach the catechism. The master appointed was adjudged inefficient by HMI Bowstead in July 1856, whereupon Radnor sacked him too. Radnor made extensive enquiries about Kirke, visited the Workhouse school without notice and interviewed Kirke privately before appointing him from November 1856. In July 1857 Kirke was inspected with approval by Matthew Arnold, whose day job was HMI under the Privy Council. Kirke's appointment tripled his salary.

Meanwhile, Julia Long was further improving the girls' school. She got the Guardians to pay for books and even building improvements, had her pay increased in 1857 to £23 12s a year, and in June 1858 she successfully asked for a counterpane and a carpet.

But on 20 July 1858 she wrote to the Guardians, with the usual numerical accuracy:

*... begging to give notice it is my intention to resign my situation on this day month August 17<sup>th</sup>, and I take this opportunity of returning to you my sincere thanks for your uniform kindness to me since my appointment.*

The clerk was directed to write to express the Board's regret at the prospect of losing her services. Later they were to record in her certificate of qualification that during her whole time as schoolmistress she had "given entire satisfaction."

What had prompted her resignation? On 19 August 1858 at Faringdon Julia married Benjamin Kirke.<sup>19</sup>

As might be expected, the marriage register overstates her age as 20.

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### Notes

1. This note is a by-product of an unpublished paper on the origins of the College of St Matthias, Fishponds, now part of the University of the West of England, Bristol (1997). I am grateful for assistance to the staff of the Berkshire and Bristol Record Offices; and to the St Matthias Foundation for permission to use the College archive. William Evans, University Secretary and Solicitor
2. Report of joint diocesan education committee: BRRO 37168/71
3. Privy Council Education Committee minutes 1845
4. Oxford diocesan board of education (1847) 8th report
5. Pigot (1844) *Directory of Berks & Bucks*; Census (1841) Reading St Mary
6. Horn P (1979) *Village Education in 19th Century Oxfordshire* xix
7. College of St Matthias Admissions Register, BRRO 37168/1
8. Census (1841) Faringdon, Berkshire, H0107/18/2
9. Census (1851) Faringdon, Berkshire, H0107/1687
10. Pigot (1854) *Directory of Berks and Bucks*; Billing (1854) *Berks and Oxon Directory and Gazetteer*; Kelly (1847) *Berkshire Directory*
11. Census (1841) Faringdon, Berkshire, H0107/18/2
12. College of St Matthias admissions register, BRRO 37168/1
13. Census (1851) Faringdon, Berkshire, H0107/1687
14. Poor Law Commission (1835) first report, rules xviii and xxxvi
15. Poor Law Commission (1837) third report, appx A, 78-86
16. Poor Law Board General order 24 July 1847, article 114
17. Minute Books of Faringdon Union Board of Guardians 1851 onwards; Berkshire Record Office G/F 1/15-18

18. Horn (1978) pp. 178-181, drawing on Radnor correspondence in the Berkshire record Office.
19. Faringdon Parish Marriages Register (1858); transcript by Faringdon Historical Society; Oxfordshire Archives and Berkshire Record Office

In the beginning discipline in the Workhouse was strict and the diet was plain and simple. Children were dressed in ill-fitting uniforms, cast-offs and hand-me-downs. The boys had their hair shaved except for a short quiff in front to prevent acquiring head vermin.

Conditions for the paupers tended to improve as time went on. Children were allowed toys and picture books and adults were given books and newspapers in 1890. In the same year all inmates were permitted to attend the Faringdon Sports on Whit Monday, and from 1888 onwards, the Faringdon Chemist gave a 'limelight' show each Christmas. Around this time young boys in the Workhouse were regularly allowed out to play football or cricket against members of the National and British Schools in Faringdon.

#### **Extracts from the Faringdon Advertiser**

**Nov 26 1904** Master of the Workhouse reported the number of tramps admitted during the last fortnight 191 as against 117 last year.

**Mar 6 1907** 239 tramps admitted in the last fortnight as against 180 last year.

**Apr 13 1907** 239 tramps admitted in the last fortnight as against 190 last year. A tea and concert given to the inmates by the Free Church Council was much appreciated.

**Jan 3 1914** Christmas party – on the same lines as 1922.

**Dec 12 1914** The number of inmates for the last fortnight was 66 as against 60 last year. The Children's Home has 28 in the last fortnight as against 29 last year. The number of tramps was 155 in the last fortnight as against 239 last year.

**Feb 27 1915** Decided to give Miss Bizzell, Children's Caretaker, a rise of £5 per year & to Mr D. L. Stevenson, Relieving Officer, a rise of £20 per year. Inmates numbered in the last fortnight 67 as against 66 last year, Children numbered in the last fortnight 29 as against 28 last year, tramps numbered in the last fortnight 188 as against 246 last year.

**Jan 29 1916** Alterations to the Workhouse. Inmates numbered in the last fortnight 56 as against 67 last year, Children numbered in the last fortnight 33 as against 28 last year, tramps numbered 144 as against 198 last year. As a consequence of there being so few women inmates capable of rendering assistance in the house the Matron asked for additional help. The Chairman said there were really only five who could assist. Mr Heavens said that questions were continually being asked in the town why so many officers were required when there were considerably fewer inmates now than in years gone by. Mr Liddiard said he should like to know how many officers there was in this Union 35 years ago and how many inmates. Mr Knapp said he should like to know what proportion of the money that came in went to the poor and what proportion to the officers. The Chairman said they were compelled to have additional officers now. Mr Liddiard said that might be but it was just as well to have a comparison and to

let the public know. The Chairman mentioned some of the duties that had to be performed. In the hospital there were thirty patients and two nurses and one patient in the men's ward and one in the women's who required constant attention night and day. In the Children's House there were two very young children who required a lot of attention. At one time there used to be a good number of women who could render assistance. Mr Heavens said the Local Government Board were far more particular then they used to be but he still thought there were not more than half as many inmates in the house now as there were 35 years ago. The Clerk said he would get the particulars asked for by Mr Liddiard. It was left with the Chairman to arrange matters with the Matron as to having additional help occasionally.

**May 27 1916** Inmates numbered in the last fortnight 49 as against 58, Children 28 as against 31, tramps 100 as against 166.

**Jun 17 1916** Inmates numbered in the last fortnight 52 as against 54, Children 28 as against 27, tramps 133 as against 216.

**Jul 29 1916** Colonel & Mrs Ward Bennitt sent a letter kindly inviting the inmates of the Institution to spend an afternoon and have tea at Faringdon House and also stating they would be pleased to see any of the Guardians who cared to come. Thanks were expressed for the invitation which was accepted for Friday 28<sup>th</sup>. Only one tender received for the supply of 140 tones of coal to the Institution. This was from Messrs Toomers & Sons who stated they would not be able to supply Forest coal but they could supply and deliver best household cobbles at £1 6s per ton. The tender was accepted. Inmates numbered in the last fortnight 52 as against 54, Children 28 as against 32, tramps 75 as against 108.

**Aug 5 1916** Treat to the Workhouse inmates. A very happy time was spent by the inmates of the Faringdon Workhouse and those of the officers who could be spared, at Faringdon House Park on Friday afternoon last week. Where they had assembled by the kind invitation of Colonel & Mrs Ward Bennitt who did their best to provide suitable amusements for the guests and entertained them to a capital tea which it need scarcely be said was greatly enjoyed.

**Aug 12 1916** Inmates numbered in the last fortnight 52 as against 55, Children 28 as against 32, tramps 66 as against 114.

**Sep 16 1916** The Chairman stated that when the Local Government Board Inspector recently visited the Workhouse he suggested that on two days of the week cheese should be substituted for meat at the midday meal. The Matron had been very carefully into the matter, comparing the prices, and found the difference between the cost of supplying cheese instead of meat as suggested, would be 6d per day on the whole house. The Inspector, no doubt, thought that as beef was so dear, cheese would be more easily obtainable. The Chairman did not think this was the case and considering the difference in the cost was so small he did not think it was worth while to make any alterations. A letter was read from Lady Barker, Stanford Place, which stated that owing to unfavourable weather she had been unable to have the children and officers to tea as usual in the summer and she asked permission to pay for their admission to a circus which was announced to visit the town next week. The Board accepted the offer



and gave thanks. Inmates numbered in the last fortnight 54 as against 53, Children 28 as against 31, tramps 110 as against 156.

**Oct 28 1916** Mr G. E. Liddiard was against an increase in school teachers' salaries, also Mr E. Heavens. Mr L. Knapp was for the increase. There was a proposal to write to the Education Committee saying the Board was against the increase, carried 9-2, 4 members not voting. Inmates numbered in the last fortnight 59, Children 29, tramps 86 as against 105.

**Dec 30 1916** Christmas at the Workhouse. The inmates of the Faringdon Union had their usual Christmas fare and spent a very happy time. As in previous years, the necessaries for the extra fare were provided by the generosity of friends in the town and neighbourhood and no part of the cost falls upon the rates. Gifts were given of beer, toys, rabbits, decorations for the Xmas tree, oranges and apples, mittens, Xmas cards, tobacco, cake, pudding, goose, two chickens. Breakfast was served at 8a.m. and consisted of sausages, bread and butter, tea and coffee. Service in the Chapel at 9.15 was conducted by the Chaplain, Rev. E. Thorpe. Dinner was served in the dining hall which had been profusely and prettily decorated, at 1p.m.. Beef, pork, goose, chicken, vegetables, plum pudding and mince pies was served. In the afternoon dessert was distributed, also pipes, tobacco and snuff. Tea was laid at 5.30, the special fare being much enjoyed. A concert was given in the evening. The Children intended to give a number of charades, but unfortunately one of their number, Frank Monk, succumbed to an illness and this part of the programme had to be abandoned. [Funeral of Frank Monk, who died at the Children's Home on 24<sup>th</sup> Dec, took place on Thursday afternoon. He was a quiet, well-behaved boy and much liked by the officers and his companions. Several officers and a number of children attended as mourners. Floral tributes came from:- the Mother and other female inmates; Miss Bizzell and Children; Mr & Mrs J. Monk; Scholars and Teachers of Faringdon C.E. School; his teacher Miss Young].

**Jun 14 1919** The Board was asked to support a resolution to the effect that the Old Age Pensions Act be amended so as to provide that the Guardians be empowered to grant out door relief in cases where there is no other income except the pension. The Chairman pointed out that this was already done to a certain extent in this Union where many Old Age Pensioners were receiving extras as ordered by the doctors. Matron reported 90 inmates as against 97, Children numbered 30 as against 34.

**Aug 16 1919** Inmates 95 as against 100, Children 32 as against 35.

**Sep 13 1919** Inmates 94 as against 93, Children 31 as against 33.

### **Extracts from the North Wilts Herald**

**Dec 29<sup>th</sup> 1922** Christmas With The Poor. At the Poor Law Institution on Christmas Day a very pleasant time was spent by the inmates thanks to the generosity of many of the residents in the town and neighbourhood, combined with the hard work of the officers. At 9 o'clock a service was held in the chapel, which was very prettily decorated by Miss Hankins. At 1 o'clock dinner was served with Mr A. J. Fereman (chairman of the Board of Guardians) presiding. He was assisted by the Matron (Miss Fereman), Mr Fereman and other officers.

Mr P. H. Caulfield and Mr T. Casstles also acted as carriers. After dinner tobacco was distributed to the men, and the hospital wards were visited, carols being sung to the patients, who were well looked after throughout the mealtimes by the nurses, assisted by Mr Caulfield and others. In the afternoon a distribution of oranges, apples, nuts etc took place, and tea was served. Miss Habgood (lady Guardian) was present, and here again the officers and others who helped were kept busy. A concert took place in the evening in the dining hall. This was arranged by Mrs Hurst, the nurses, Mr Caulfield and Mr Casstles. The children were the chief performers and gave a very pleasing entertainment, and several others kindly took part. A Christmas tree was provided and the children were recipients of presents. The dining hall was tastefully decorated by Mr Bizzell and Mr Collins, and the hospitals by the nurses. Subscriptions were sent by the following: Lady Fitzgerald, Lady Violet Henderson, Mrs C. G. Edwards, Mrs F. M. Butler, Mrs Lessing, Mrs Prioleau, Mrs Banbury, the Hon. Mrs D. P. Bouverie, Lord Faringdon, the Rev. Lord de Mauley, the Rev. A. J. F. Hobbs, the Rev. E. F. Hall, the Rev. R. G. P. Brownrigg, the Rev. Treadwell, the Rev. A. Hawkins, Capt. Allen Stevens, Col. A.W. Parsons, Mr E. A. Strauss, Sir C. G. Hyde, Major W. Taylor, Mr W. G. Cram, Mr H. C. Rose, Mr P. Bouverie Pusey, Major A. T. West, Col. Ward Bennitt, Mr J. Wilson, Mr T. Freer Meade, Col. Bedford Pim. Rear Admiral Clifton Brown, Mr D. L. Brereton, Mr H. George, Mr P. Pcock, Mr G. E. Liddiard, Mr A. T. Loyd M.P., Capt. C. G. Cunard, Mr J. P. Lockwood and the Hon. Whiteley. The following sent gifts: The Hon. Mrs D. P. Bouverie – goose, pudding, cake and apples; Mrs G. Adams – two chickens; Mr W. Crosland – apples; Admiral Clifton Brown – rabbits; Miss Wheeler – toys; Mrs Day – books and toys; Miss Habgood – toys; Mrs Burgess – papers; Misses Burge – toys; Mrs Leverton – sweets and oranges; Mr W. Tucker – Christmas tree; Mr G. E. Liddiard – cake and nuts; Mr R. Johnson – tobacco etc. A collection for beer for the inmates was made at the Institute and Services Club. Mrs Tucker, of Woolstone (one of the lady Guardians) also collected for the old folks and children in the institution, the list of subscribers being as follows: Lady Butler, Mr & Mrs Maundrell, Mrs Cobb, Mr P. Adams, Mr Hedges, Mr E. Tucker, Mr H. Tucker, Mr Chamberlain, Mr Wheeler, Mr E. White, Mr Frogley, Mr Heavens, Mr Chisolm, Mr C. Maidment, Miss Tucker, Mr Wilmer, Mr Manners, Mr Pepler, Mr V. Day, Mr R. Day, Mr Butler, Mr Jenkins, Rev. Hadon, Mrs Whitfield, Mr Taylor, Mr Lawrence, Mr Melver, Mrs Jefferies, Mrs Liddiard, Mrs Green, Mrs Wastle Green, Mrs R. Adams, Mr G. Wilson, Mr Gawthrop, Miss Crofton, Mr Packet, Mrs Norton, Col. W. H. Ames, Mr Frazer, Mr Chandler, Lechlade Guardians, a friend. Mrs Tucker – 200 oranges, Mr Joseph Goddard – toys for children.

### **Extracts from the Faringdon Advertiser**

**Sep 19 1925** Advert asking for tenders to supply the Workhouse by butchers, grocers, millers, drapers, shoemakers & bakers (to supply loaves of 4lb and 2lb for indoor and outdoor poor of best seconds wheaten bread.

In 1914 World War 1 began and many men joined the army. One such was Ernest John Chambers, son of William Chambers of Gravel Walk, aged 46

years, he had served in the Royal Berks Regiment from 1885 to 1900. He had married Ellen 25 years previously but she had died 4 years ago and he was left with three young daughters, Ethel born 1903, Jessie born 1906 and Florence born 1909 (he had 4 other children who were adults by then). While he was away the two older of these children were in the workhouse and Florence was with her grandfather and brother. He joined the Pioneers and in September 1915 he landed in France. In March of the following year he was drowned in an accident. In May 1916 Florence joined her sisters in the workhouse.

**A day in the life of a child in Faringdon Poor Law Union in early 1920's from William Butler's memories.**

*"They were awakened at 6 a.m. One of the older boys went to the main part of home (where men and women stayed) to bring breakfast which consisted of oatmeal porridge, a piece of bread, milk or tea.*

*The boys made their own cots fit for inspection, swept the floor and polished brass knobs of doors, some washed steel steps from upper level and floors of the lavatory, also rooms where they took a bath (one a week) then prepared for school, shine shoes or boots making sure heels were done properly, washed behind ears etc. Older boys often looked after a younger boy and made their cots and also made ready for school. The children were given a piece of caraway cake for a mid-morning snack but William said it was usually eaten before they arrived at school. William attended the Church of England School for boys outside the complex. The students lined up outside and marched in. Prayers were said and usually a hymn and if it wasn't sung properly they sung it over until it was."*

**Picture of performance**

c.1924 Children dressed up for a performance of 'Old King Cole' in front of the chapel in the Poor Law Union and was performed for the older residents. Not all the children in the picture lived at the Home but were children of the people who managed the Home. Mr Caulfield, inspector of schools, and Mrs Payne, the headmaster's wife, organized the play. William said they may have put it on for other people as well. Left to right, back row: Nancy Jackson, with crown and holding a doll; Reg Wooliffe, with black hat; Evelyn Vincent; William Butler, with horn; Ethel Hart, with crown; --- Linscott; --- Godwin. 2<sup>nd</sup> row from back, standing: --- Carter; --- Linscott; --- Carter, with fiddle; --- Godwin; ?; Stan Wooliffe, with fiddle; Fred Butler; --- Johnson, baker; Alice Jackson, cook. 3<sup>rd</sup> row from back, sitting: --- Pusey, ?, scarecrow; Leslie Lynn; ?; ?, egg. Front row: ?; ?; --- Payne; --- Godwin; --- Carter; ?.

Mrs Herring, nee Mullet, who was assistant matron at the Workhouse from 1928 until it closed in 1932, remembers her time there very clearly.

*All the inmates and the staff had to sign in and out at the porter's room. Every Sunday afternoon from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. the parents were allowed to see their children in the inmates' dining room. This was also the occasion for meeting 'outside' visitors. The children spent the rest of the week under the care of a Foster Mother and Father in the children's section. At the age of five they went to school.*

Before Mrs Herring went to the Workhouse sewing had been sent out, but she made uniforms for the schoolgirls out of checked material instead of the striped pyjama type cloth used previously. She also made clothes for concerts which were given to raise money to take the men, women and 28 children on their yearly outing to Highcliffe on Sea. In August, the staff walked the fit inmates down to Radcot and had a picnic there. The staff had one evening and one day off, otherwise they were not allowed outside the institution. Their pay was 15/- a week. The hospital took in maternity cases from the town, as this was before the National Health Service.

In 1919 the Board of Guardians sanctioned the giving of additional and better fare to the inmates of the Union and the Children's Home on Peace Day. They would be invited to tea and sports which were to be provided by the town. There were 92 inmates and 34 children.

**Extract from the Faringdon Advertiser**

**Nov 17 1933** Major Ralph Glyn's reply to the protest offered by the W.I. against closing of the Faringdon Public Assistance Institution: - The following information gives a full explanation of the reasons for closing the building. When the Local Government Act of 1929 came into operation, 11 Public Assistance Institutions were transferred to the County Council. 6 of these formerly served parishes in adjoining counties as well as parishes in Berkshire. Consequently, there was more accommodation than is required and the building at Faringdon is to be closed on the grounds of redundancy and economy. The approximate saving to the County ratepayers is £2,500 per annum. There at present 40 inmates & 15 children, with a staff of about 12. Although local tenders for meat, milk & bread have been accepted, the supplies are not considerable. The building was constructed in 1801-4, it is inconvenient & draughty. The stairs are steep & narrow & the upper floors are unsuitable for use owing to the great difficulties to be encountered in case of fire. The Children's Home, attached to the Institution has been condemned by the Ministry of Health, who are pressing for it to be closed. The inmates receive very few visits from relations & friends, so it is not thought that their removal to another institution will constitute a hardship. 6 of the present inmates have already been transferred from other parts of Berkshire. The Committee dealing with this matter have considered it very carefully and have come to the conclusion that they are fully justified in recommending the closing of the Institution.

When the Workhouse closed the inmates went to Wantage, Hungerford, or their own counties, while the children were fostered out.

Quote from a policeman about the workhouse:-

*It was built of stone, U shaped and three storeys high, having a large cellar, large paved courtyard in the middle and a big iron bell on the wall for calling forth the inmates. Every policeman who served at Faringdon, knew the place as a regular maze of stairways and doors. The police maintained law and order in the workhouse as well as coping with their normal work. The workhouse duty was known as relieving and included ensuring the tasks for the day were completed by the lodgers.*

### **Christmas Day in the Workhouse by George R. Sims 1879**

It is Christmas Day in the Workhouse  
 And the cold, bare walls are bright  
 With garlands of green and holly,  
 And the place is a pleasant sight;  
 For with clean-washed hands and faces,  
 In a long and hungry line  
 The paupers sit at the table,  
 For this is the hour they dine.

And the guardians and their ladies,  
 Although the wind is east,  
 Have come in their furs and wrappers,  
 To watch their charges feast;  
 To smile and be condescending,  
 Put pudding on pauper plates.  
 To be hosts at the workhouse banquet  
 They've paid for – with the rates.

Oh, the paupers are meek and lowly  
 With their "Thank'ee kindly, mum's!"  
 So long as they fill their stomachs,  
 What matter whence it comes!  
 But one of the old men mutters,  
 And pushes his plate aside:  
 "Greta God!" he cries, "but it chokes me!  
 For this is the day *she* died!"

The guardians gazed in horror,  
 The master's face went white:  
 "Did a pauper refuse the pudding?"  
 "Could their ears believe aright?"  
 Then the ladies clutched their husbands,  
 Thinking the man would die,  
 Struck by a bolt, or something,  
 By the outraged One on high.

But the pauper sat for a moment,  
 Then rose 'mid silence grim,  
 For the others had ceased to chatter  
 And trembled in every limb.  
 He looked at the guardians' ladies,  
 Then, eyeing their lords, he said,  
 "I eat not the food of villains  
 Whose hands are foul and red:

"Whose victims cry for vengeance  
 From their dark, unhallowed graves."  
 "He's drunk!" said the workhouse master,  
 "Or else he's mad and raves."  
 "Not drunk or mad," cried the pauper,  
 "But only a haunted beast,  
 Who, torn by the hounds and mangled,  
 Declines the vulture's feast.

"I care not a curse for the guardians,  
 And I won't be dragged away;  
 Just let me have the fit out,  
 It's only on Christmas Day  
 That the black past comes to goad me,  
 And prey on my burning brain;  
 I'll tell you the rest in a whisper –  
 I swear I won't shout again.

"Keep your hands off me, curse you!  
 Hear me right out to the end.  
 You come here to see how paupers  
 The season of Christmas spend;  
 You come here to watch us feeding,  
 As they watched the captured beast.  
 Here's why a penniless pauper  
 Spits on your paltry feast.

"Do you think I will take your bounty,  
 And let you smile and think  
 You're doing a noble action  
 With the parish's meat and drink?  
 Where is my wife you slew?  
 Yes, by the God above me,  
 My Nance was killed by you!

"Last winter my wife lay dying,  
 Starved in a filthy den;  
 I had never been to the parish –  
 I came to the parish then.  
 I swallowed my pride in coming,  
 For ere the ruin came,  
 I held up my head as a trader,  
 And I bore a spotless name.

"I came to the parish, craving  
 Bread for a starving wife,  
 Bread for the woman who'd loved me  
 Through fifty years of life;  
 And what do you think they told me,  
 Mocking my awful grief,  
 That 'the House; was open to us  
 But they wouldn't give 'out relief'.

"I slunk to the filthy alley –  
 'Twas a cold, raw Christmas Eve –  
 And the bakers' shops were open,  
 Tempting a man to thief;  
 But I clenched my fists together,  
 Holding my head awry,  
 So I came to her empty-handed  
 And mournfully told her why.

"Then I told her the house was open;  
 She had heard of the ways of *that*,  
 For her bloodless cheeks went crimson,  
 And up in her rags she sat,  
 Crying, 'Bide the Christmas here, John,  
 We've never had one apart;  
 I think I can bear the hunger –  
 The other would break my heart.'

"All through that eve I watched her,  
 Holding her hand in mine,  
 Praying the Lord and weeping,  
 Till my lips were salt as brine;  
 I asked her once if she hungered,  
 And as she answered 'No',  
 The moon shone in at the window,  
 Set in a wreath of snow.

"Then the room was bathed in glory,  
 And I saw in my darling's eyes  
 The faraway look of wonder  
 That comes when the spirit flies;  
 And her lips were parched and parted,  
 And her reason came and went.  
 For she raved of our home in Devon,  
 Where our happiest years were spent.

“And the accents, long forgotten,  
 Came back to the tongue once more,  
 For she talked like the country lassie  
 I woo’d by the Devon shore;  
 Then she rose to her feet and trembled,  
 And fell on the rags and moaned,  
 And, ‘Give me a crust – I’m famished –  
 For the love of God!’ she groaned.

“I rushed from the room like a madman  
 And flew to the workhouse gate,  
 Crying, ‘Food for a dying woman!’  
 And the answer came, ‘Too late.’  
 They drove me away with curses;  
 Then I fought with a dog in the street  
 And tore from the mongrel’s clutches  
 A crust he was trying to eat.

“Back through the filthy byways!  
 Back through the trampled slush!  
 Up to the crazy garret,  
 Wrapped in an awful hush;  
 My heart sank down at the threshold,  
 And I paused with a sudden thrill.  
 For there, in the silv’ry moonlight,  
 My Nance lay, cold and still.

“Up to the blackened ceiling,  
 The sunken eyes were cast –  
 I knew on those lips, all bloodless,  
 My name had been the last;  
 She called for her absent husband –  
 O God! Had I but known! –  
 Had called in vain, and, in anguish,  
 Had died in that den – *alone*.

“Yes, there, in a land of plenty,  
 Lay a loving woman dead,  
 Cruelly starved and murdered  
 For a loaf of parish bread;  
 At yonder gate, last Christmas,  
 I craved for a human life,  
 You, who would feed us paupers,  
*What of my murdered wife!”*



“There, get ye gone to your dinners,  
Don't mind me in the least,  
Think of the happy paupers  
Eating your Christmas feast;  
And when you recount their blessings  
In your smug parochial way,  
Say what you did for me, too,  
Only last Christmas Day.”



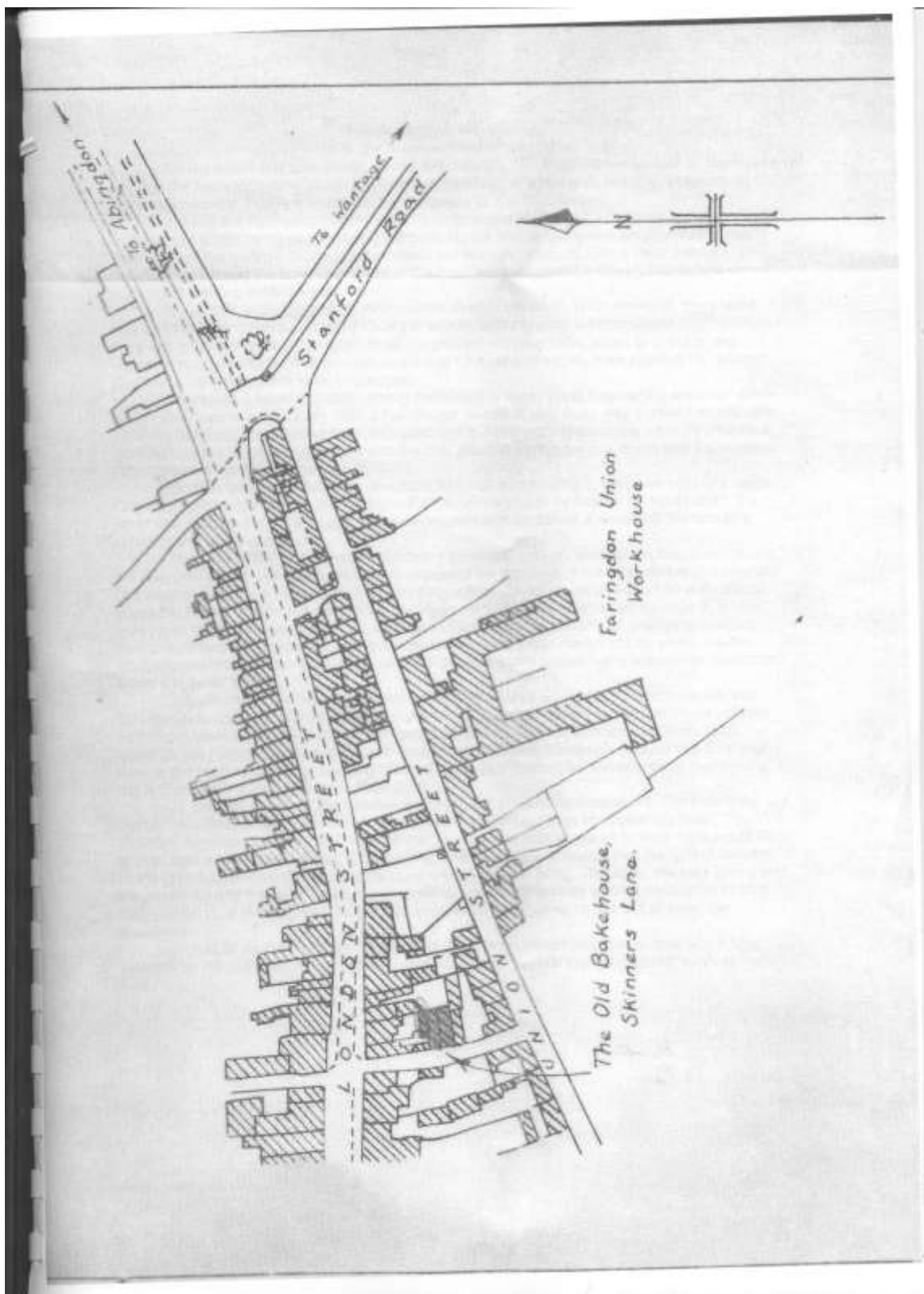
Mr Dixey with the hospital wing of the Workhouse behind him.



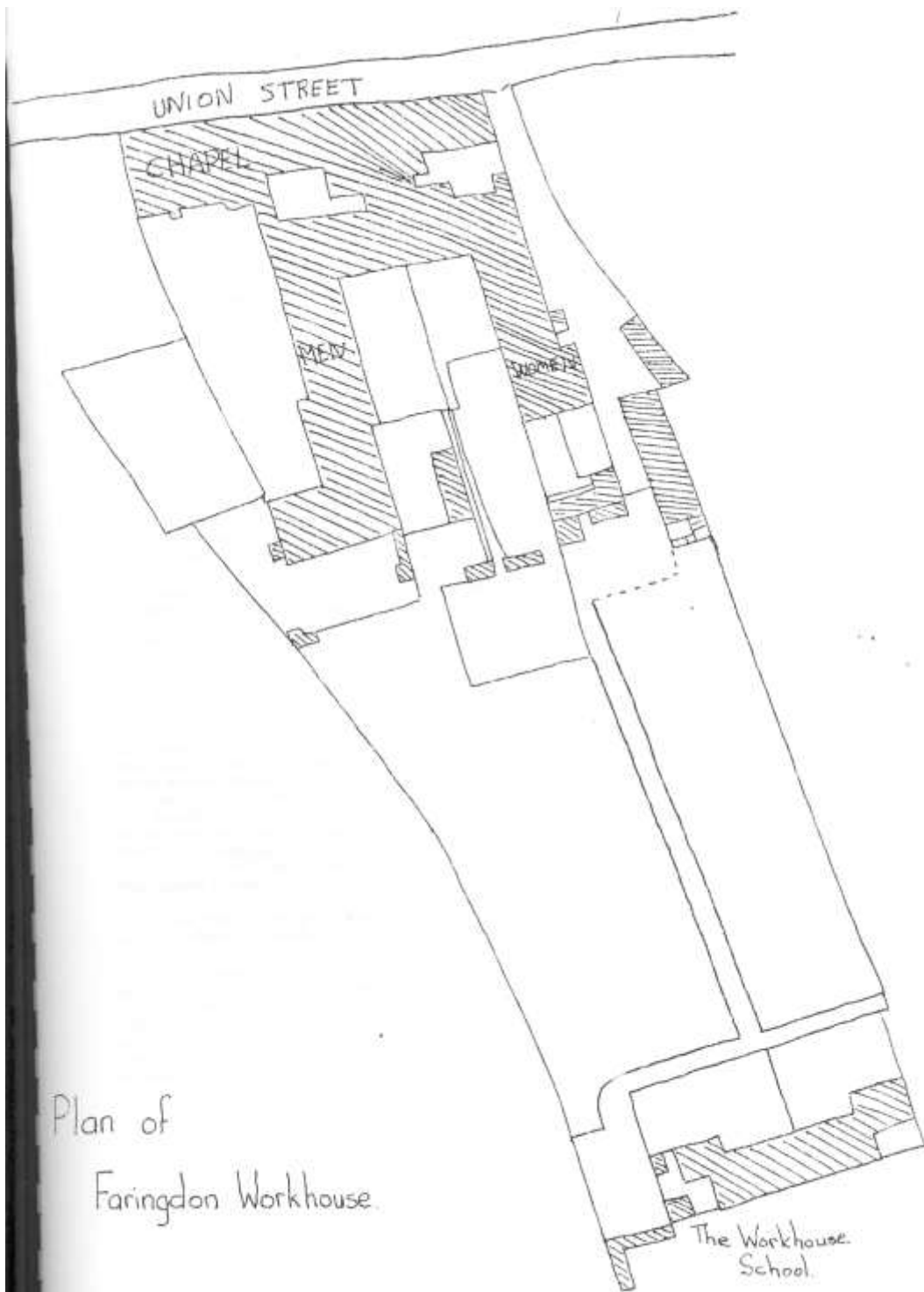
Girl in the yard where the tramps had to cut logs from railway sleepers.



Two children in front of the Workhouse colonnades.



Situation of the Workhouse.



Plan of  
Faringdon Workhouse.



Rough Plan of the area covered by the Faringdon Union.

#### KEY

No.	Place	No.	Place	No.	Place
1	Ashbury	11	Shellingford	21	Watchfield
2	Bourton	12	Hatford	22	Baulking
3	Buckland	13	Hinton Waldrist	23	Woolstone
4	Buscot	14	Kingston Lisle	24	Stanford
5	Charney	15	Longcot	25	Radcot
6	Coleshill	16	Longworth	26	Little Coxwell
7	Compton Beauchamp	17	Pusey	27	Lechlade
8	Great Coxwell	18	Fernham	28	Kelmscot
9	Eaton Hastings	19	Shrivenham	29	Langford
10	Faringdon	20	Uffington		