

Life in the Workhouses



Workhouses

A workhouse was a building that the very poorest people used to live and work in.

They were first built about 400 years ago.

Workhouses ended in 1930.



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Who Lived in a Workhouse?

In the past, workhouses were built for very poor people.

They had to live and work there, otherwise they would have been homeless.

The type of people who lived there were the elderly, ill, orphaned children and people with physical or mental impairments.



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Families

If the man of the family could not find work, he and his whole family had to move into a workhouse.

Women lived in one area, men in another and children lived somewhere else in the building.



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Work in a Workhouse

Men had to break stones apart with heavy tools, work in the fields, grind corn and chop wood.

Women had to do the sewing, laundry, spinning, scrubbing floors and walls, and oakum. Oakum was picking apart old ropes for hours on end.



Clothes

People in the workhouse had to wear a rough uniform, which was scratchy and uncomfortable.



Food

Food was a watery porridge called gruel.

Sometimes, there was some bread and cheese available too.



Children in the Workhouse

Children were kept apart from their parents. Once a week, they were allowed a little time together, depending on the workhouse rules.

Many children in a workhouse were orphans. This meant they did not have any parents.

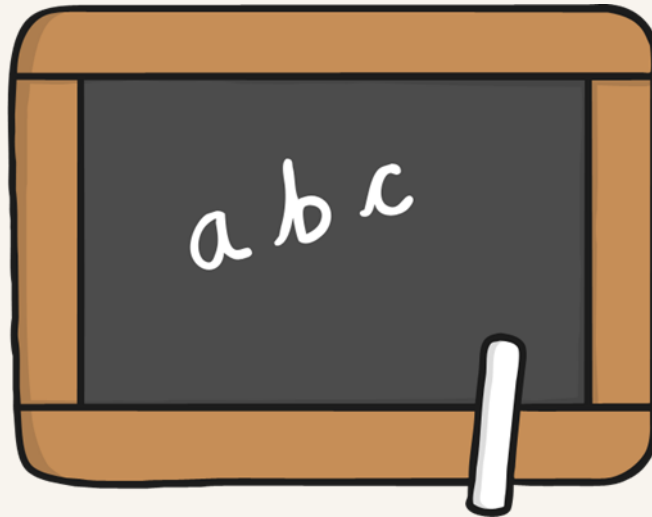


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School

For three hours a day, children had lessons in reading, writing, Christian religion and arithmetic, which was maths.

In many workhouses, boys had more lessons than girls. The girls generally learned needlework and knitting.



Sleep

Children had to sleep in large dormitories, which were big rooms with many beds.

The girls often had to share a bed with three other girls.



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Punishments

If an adult needed punishing, they often had to miss a meal, sometimes more than one!

For more serious crimes, like breaking a window, they might have to go to prison for two months!



Rules

There were many rules in a workhouse:

- No one was allowed to leave without permission.
- Reading newspapers, leaflets or books was not allowed.
- Everyone had to go to church twice every Sunday.
- Adults had to go to bed at 8pm and be up at 6am every day.
- No one was allowed to play cards or any other games.



The End of Workhouses

Workhouses ended in 1930. Most of the buildings became hospitals and care homes.



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