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THE WORKHOUSE



Before 1834, responsibility for the relief of the poor lay at local level with parish overseers of the poor. Parish overseers were unpaid and elected annually. It was not a popular job. Poor rates were dispensed to the needy, usually in the form of bread or money.

Lingfield was also well endowed with local Charities initiated by local benefactors:

- 1654 John Hole left £2.8s yearly for the poor.
- 1684 W Saxby left £10.10s yearly for coats and gowns for five poor men and five poor women to be delivered with one shilling in money on Good Friday every year.
- 1716 John Piggott left £2 yearly to be divided into groats and given to the poor on Good Friday.

Later Charities included S Turton, who left £2.16s 8d yearly for six widows, John Smith who left £24 yearly for coals for the poor and Henry Smith's charity, which still exists to this day.

A notable benefactor to the poor was John Hochee's widow, Charlotte, who in 1874 left a gift of 'a newly erected double cottage on the site of a limekiln at the crossroads at Dormansland' (the present Hochee Cottage). This was to be occupied by aged and infirm residents of Lingfield. An endowment of £50 was to be invested to provide income for repairs.

In 1729, the parish agreed the building of a new workhouse 'on land near Thomas Stanford's home and old lime kiln belonging to George Leigh'. Cottages belonging to the parish were sold off to pay for the building. The building (the present day house 'The Garth' in Newchapel Road) was to be built by Thomas Stanford, carpenter, at a cost of £290. Construction was to be of 'burnt brick to the first floor, with walls 14 inches thick. Upper floor to be weather tiled and the whole building to measure 70ft x 20ft x 15ft high to top of walls.' There was to be a separate brewhouse (28ft x 14ft) of timber or brick panelling and a pantry with a chimney of burnt brick.

The image of the workhouse is one of harshness, severity and a lack of individuality. Life was dreary and uniform. There is nothing to suppose that life in the Lingfield Workhouse at that time was any different.

In 1800 the building consisted of a kitchen, Drink Room, Brewhouse, Great Room, Schoolhouse and little room beyond. Upstairs were 13 rooms, plus West Garrett, Long Garrett (housing 15 beds), East Garrett. Thirty-six years earlier in 1764 a 'Room of Confinement' was listed, missing from later inventories. Only twelve years earlier in 1788 Beehives were listed as residing in the Garrett, presumably these were removed to make way for more beds.

It would appear that the inhabitants of the workhouse were put to work spinning and weaving, with a quilting frame and at least two weavers' looms, listed in inventories. Accounts refer to payment for flax spinning, weaving and finishing cloth; both in the poor house and in paupers' houses. Workhouse inventories refer to quantities of shirting, sheeting, wools and yarns being stored. In 1802 the cloth in the store room was listed as 143 ells of shirting, 139 ells of sheeting, 26 yards of wools. (An ell measurement was: 45 inches / 114cm)

Food was boring and monotonous. In the 1800 Inventory for the whole Workhouse, provisions are listed as:

2 sacks of flour; 7 loaves; 2 tubbs of pork; 5 legs of pork and back; 6 crocks of lard; 2 tubbs of ale and one of small beer; 18 cheeses.

The diet was exactly the same a year later.

In 1834 the Government passed the Poor Law Amendments Act, whereby parishes were to join together to form Unions to help efficient use of resources. Life in the Workhouse was intended to act as a deterrent to the able-bodied pauper and would therefore be made worse than the poorest life outside. Any able-bodied person who wanted help would have to live in the workhouse to receive it. Husbands, wives and children were to be separated. The idea was that only the destitute would wish to seek admission. Workhouses rapidly entered the public imagination as symbols of degradation and the 'respectable' poor would do almost anything to avoid being put into them.

In 1835 Lingfield joined the East Grinstead Union, which consisted of the parishes of East Grinstead, West Hoathly, Worth, Crawley, Hartfield, Withyham and Lingfield, serving a population of nearly 12,000. East Grinstead workhouse received the able-bodied (80 males and 20 females) with any overflow going to Withyham. Worth took the aged and infirm, Hartfield the girls and Lingfield the boys.

An advertisement was placed in the The Times and Lewes newspapers for 'A Proper Person and his wife to undertake Management of Lingfield and their instruction in habits of Industry at a salary of £35 per annum.' The person was 'to be without Incumbrances and able to keep Accounts.'

Before the Union, the Governor of Lingfield Workhouse was Mr Stephen Jenkins and it seems that in spite of advertising for a new Governor he was kept on in that position, as he is still there two years later.

There seems to have been some dissent from Lingfield against joining the East Grinstead Union at the beginning, as the Clerk is constantly reminding the Lingfield Overseers to attend the weekly meetings of the Board. It seems that the Lingfield Governor was given to understand that they were to join the Godstone Union instead. This did not in fact happen until 1897.

The Lingfield Governor appears to have tried hard to keep the Workhouse boys busy and industrious. George Daulton, an inmate of the East Grinstead Workhouse, was hired to teach the boys shoemaking – three days at Lingfield and three days at East Grinstead at a rate of twelve shillings a week.

In October 1836 hat blocks and a press were ordered and someone was hired to teach the boys how to make straw hats and bonnets. On 10th November 1836 the Governor reported that 141 straw hats and bonnets had been made at an average cost of 4 pence each for materials. In the same month the Governor procured knitting needles and worsted for the boys to knit stockings. Moleskin waistcoats ornamented with white metal buttons were also apparently made. A scale of wages was agreed to be paid for boys engaged in husbandry.

It was also common practice for children to be placed out as servants or apprentices. At Lingfield it was resolved that a premium of ten shillings be given for each child who

might be permanently placed out as either a servant or an apprentice. In June 1836 the Poor Law Commissioners were asked if they had any objection to parish boys being placed as apprentices to chimney sweeps. The Commissioners had no objection.

There were several instances of boys running away, the normal punishment for which appears to have been 24 hours solitary confinement and a diet of bread and water for two days. Boys who habitually ran away were flogged with six strokes of a birch rod. One boy, Richard Payne, who was flogged for running away five times, was taken out of the Workhouse on the same day by his mother

In April 1837 enquiries were made in respect of the consumption of beer at Lingfield Workhouse, being greater than that at East Grinstead. Six months later The Governor, Stephen Jenkins, was found 'in liquor' at 2 o'clock in the afternoon and dismissed.

The new Governor, Alfred George Walford, from Somerstown in London, was appointed with his wife and a much harsher regime was introduced. Within a month five boys had been flogged for such misdemeanours as wetting the bed, stealing carrots and absconding. The Governor was reprimanded by the Board and instructed not to use corporal punishment in future without first reporting the case to the Board.

Up until 1849 the Governor was also the schoolteacher. In November of that year, the Governor, Edward Groves, who was then in his 70s, was found to be unable to keep to keep the boys under proper control and a schoolmaster was appointed at a salary of £20 per annum plus rations. Mr Groves and his wife were kept on as Master and Matron at a salary of £20 per annum (a reduction of £15 per annum from 14 years earlier).

Mr Simmonds, the schoolmaster, was then only 22 years of age and also appears not have been able to keep control. Almost immediately after his appointment he was investigated by the Board for severely flogging a boy with a flat piece of board, the boys 'having been refractory and almost unmanageable.' After this occurrence and a similar one at the girls' Workhouse at Hartfield, eleven women from the East Grinstead Workhouse requested permission to visit their children, presumably to check that they were not being mistreated.

In November 1850 consent was granted for the schoolmaster to assist with the evening (adult) school at Lingfield, which was run by the Curate, Mr Steward. In 1851 consent was also given for the formation of a District School for 'Industrial Training of Pauper Classes', including Tunbridge and Godstone Union areas.

For the next few years there was quite a high turnover of schoolteaching staff. John Simmonds resigned in 1851 and a new schoolmaster, Walter Garthwaite, was appointed. Mr Garthwaite only seems to have stayed a few weeks, as four weeks later Mr James Lee was appointed schoolmaster. At the end of the year, copy-books written by the boys and a writing specimen by 16-year old William Manser was sent to the Board, which expressed satisfaction at the management of the school. However, in May of the following year Mr Lee also resigned, having been absent without leave and

returning in a state of intoxication. James Gilbert was appointed the new schoolmaster, but eight months later he too was given notice to quit (no reason given) and Benjamin Groves was appointed Master of the Workhouse at a salary of £20 per annum, plus Schoolmaster at an additional salary of £20 plus rations.

A period of stability then reigned and Mr Groves stayed as Master and Schoolmaster for another six years. In November 1858 he submitted his resignation, which was not accepted by the Board. Mr Groves then submitted a proposal that he and his nephew continue to manage the Lingfield Workhouse until the new East Grinstead Workhouse was built (presumably he had an eye to the more prestigious appointment of managing the new East Grinstead Workhouse). A new Master and Matron were appointed in 1860 – a Mr and Mrs Paine. Mr Paine was also taken on as schoolmaster. Six months on the Board reported that they had both performed satisfactorily.

The population of both Lingfield and East Grinstead Workhouses fluctuated over the years. When the weather was bad and there was no work, more families were driven to enter the Workhouse. February of 1855 was very severe and one of the coldest months ever recorded, with temperatures as low as minus 15C. An emergency meeting of the Board was held due to the ‘inclement weather.’ By the end of February the Workhouse population had shot up to 93 inmates at East Grinstead from 22 in the previous September. The population at Lingfield had increased from 27 to 44.

The Workhouse diet does not seem to have improved over the years. At the beginning of the Union in 1835, the Lingfield boys were given bread and milk for their breakfast. It seems that the diet changed for the worse in the intervening years between 1835 and 1892, when a diet of milk and bread for breakfast was once again to be implemented instead of the ‘present diet of flour and water gruel’. There appears to have been general insubordination at the East Grinstead Workhouse during 1837, the complaints being mainly about the diet. Two women paupers employed to work at Lingfield felt that they should have some sort of additional support and it was agreed that Elizabeth Steer and Jane Jupp should therefore be allowed one shilling per week for tea. In 1858 the Medical Officer for the District reported that in his opinion the general diet was insufficient and it was resolved that a proportion of vegetables be added to the diet.

Over the years finances became more restrictive and the more benign poor relief of the pre-Union days was done away with. A year after Lingfield joined the East Grinstead Union, all weekly payments for illegitimate children was removed. If any relief was required they must be taken into the Poor House. No more out-relief (i.e. relief given to people in their own houses) was to be given to able-bodied paupers. The only relief to be allowed was in the Workhouse. An exception to this rule was made in January of 1850 when the men were unable to work because of the snow, particularly in woodcutting, and urgent and immediate relief was given. Even then the relief was only administered in flour.

In 1842, all parish property except the parsonage house and the Workhouse had been sold off to provide parish contributions to the Union Workhouse. The actual Workhouse was

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also probably sold off in the early 1860's, after the building of a new Workhouse in East Grinstead large enough to accommodate 260 inmates.

Lingfield separated from the East Grinstead Union in 1897 and joined with Godstone Union. Nationally, workhouses carried on into middle of 20th century, and still continued to be looked upon with fear and loathing by the poor.

Sources:

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Ian Currie

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