

THE LIVERPOOL BROWNLOW HILL INSTITUTION

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Elizabeth I's Poor Law Act of 1601 stated that each Parish should look after its own poor. The responsibility for this should rest on the shoulders of Overseers, elected annually at Vestry Meetings, who could impose a 'ley' or rate on property owners of the parish for use in pauper relief. Although Liverpool was at that time part of the Parish of Walton, it is recorded in the Liverpool Town Book of 1656 that¹

this towne shall keepe and maintain their own poore ... and ... the antient custome for the ould Churchwardens to bee Overseers of the Poore the years ensuing be duly observed.

In 1699 Liverpool became a separate Parish from Walton by statute, and therefore had legal obligations under this Poor Law Act. By the early 1700s, various almshouses and hospitals had been built as the need arose.

Over the succeeding 150 years or so, the population, and the funds raised by the poor rate, increased rapidly:

YEAR	POPULATION	FUNDS FOR POOR RELIEF
1681	3,000	£40
1691	5,000	£100
1719		£520
1722		£1,000
1800	100,000	
1815		£5,588 (cost of Annual Relief)
1816		£6,152
1817		£11,230 (poor rate @ 1/9d in £1)
1819	ca. 300,000	£21,210
1820		£22,000 (poor rate @ 4/4d in £1)
1822		£10,395
1823		(sum still much reduced)
1858	500,000 (incr. by 12,000 pa)	

[The sums for 1822 and 1823 reflect a hardening attitude towards poor relief]

1 Liverpool Town Book, 1656. Liverpool Record Office [hereafter LRO].

The funds available for relief of the poor were distributed in the form of a dole or a sum of money. By the early 1700s the Poor Ley money was supplemented by legacies, bequests and fines. Fines were imposed for acts such as 'profane swearing' (1s. to 5s.), and money was also raised from such fees as those charged for burying a corpse in linen and not wool (£2.10s.).

In 1723, an Act provided for the erection or hire of houses which were to be offered to paupers instead of money. The names of all paupers who refused to go into the houses were to be struck off the Register, and this enabled the Vestry to help clear the streets of vagrants and beggars and to distinguish between those in genuine need and those who were seen as wanting something for nothing.

It was recorded in the minutes of the Annual Vestry of 1732 that:²

... the proceedings and agreements made and concluded upon by the parishioners and inhabitants of this Parish at severall generall meetings, lately held in the Comen Hall of the town for haveing a Workhouse, which the Trustees of the Charity School have undertaken to build for that purpose, and to lett the same for a yearly rent, videlicet:- five pounds for every hundred pounds they shall lay out therein, and the two wings already built on the southside of the Charity School containing thirty six houses for thirty six pounds per annum, they being first paid out of this ensuing years Poor Tax the arrears of rent now due for the houses; ... and to provide a stock and all things necessary to sett the poor at work therein as soon as finished, and see that all the poor be employed therein in such work they shall be found capaple of, and will tend mostly the advantage; and that no rents or reliefe be allow[e]d to any person whatsoever out of the Workhouse.

That year, 1732, the first purpose-built workhouse in Liverpool was erected in Hanover Street.

A few years later in 1745, on the site of the present St George's Hall, an Infirmary was built. This was a voluntary hospital, unconnected with the Workhouse. It had³

... 100 beds at a cost of £2,618. ... At the back of the building the wards looked to the South over a large garden that the Trustees had recently walled in in order, as the minutes tell us, to prevent the inmates from wandering into the town and there 'by acts of imprudence hindering the ways and means of their cure'.

The three storey Infirmary was flanked by two Seaman's Hospitals (similar in character to modern supervised sheltered accommodation) which housed

2 Minutes of the Annual Vestry, 11 April 1732. LRO.

3 J.B. Oldham, 'The Dawn of Surgery in Liverpool', in *Liverpool Medical History*, ed. by John A. Ross, *Transactions of the B.S.H.M.*, 16(1977), 15-16.

'decayed seamen'. The medical staff of this Infirmary consisted of 3 Honorary Physicians and 3 Honorary Surgeons, with a resident apothecary (paid £20 p.a.) and his 4 apprentices. There was also a Matron (£6 p.a.) and about 6 nurses (each £4 p.a.). The nurses' duties were not quite as well-defined as nowadays:⁴

They should show tenderness to their patients, obedience to their superiors and civility and courtesy to all strangers.

An early street map of Liverpool of 1765 drawn by John Eyes, Surveyor to Liverpool Corporation,⁵ shows School Lane, south of which are the Bluecoat Hospital and the Parish Poor House. Also on this map can be seen Shaw's Brow (now William Brown Street) running on from Dale Street, in which are Almshouses and the Seamen's Hospitals. South-east of Shaw's Brow is the Great Heath, intended for a burial ground and south of which again are further Almshouses.⁶

Families, paupers and vagrants — all were attracted to the town from the outlying districts as communications improved; but finding work was not always easy and the numbers of paupers escalated. Together with the town's own poor, including the seamen's widows (many with young children), injured dock workers, people too old to work and others who were infirm or disabled, the immigrant poor were placing a high strain on the original workhouse and the available resources.

Between 1734 and 1769, as regards support for the poor, Liverpoolians developed⁷

a constitution combined ... [with] ... an unusual degree [of] efficiency and popular control

having a salaried Treasurer, Master of the workhouse for indoor relief, and overseers and collectors who looked after the collection of rates and the overall administration. A Parish Committee elected by ratepayers at the Annual Vestry gave advice, decided policy, checked accounts and reported on the progress and fortunes of the Parish. The Minutes of the Liverpool Annual Vestry of 1769

4 *Ibid.*

5 John Eyes, *The Plan of Liverpool, Surveyed in June 1765* (Liverpool: Scouse Press, 1966).

6 It also shows the inlet from the River Mersey between Mersey Street and Pool Lane. Canning Place is now over the old dock.

7 H. Peet, *Liverpool Vestry Books, 1681-1834*, 2 vols (London: Constable, 1915).

show that it was necessary that a new workhouse should be built, sited on land owned by the Corporation on the eastern side of what is now Brownlow Hill.⁸ They state it should be built according to the plans of Mr Brooks, the new Treasurer elected in 1768,⁹ and in the following year that,

... Dr. Goldie ... be appointed to take care of the poor at the same price as he had last year, having discharged his duty to the satisfaction of the Parish and poor in general.

(According to the minutes of the 1776 Annual Vestry, the duties of the Parish Physician seem to have consisted of attendance on the sick in the workhouse and regular visits to the outdoor sick poor in their own homes).

The Brownlow Hill Institution was completed in May 1772. John Lowe was appointed as the first Master of the Workhouse at a salary of £70 p.a. He remained in post until he died in 1779 when his place was taken by Edward Lowe at a salary of £45 p.a.,¹⁰

... and Mrs. Elizabeth Lowe, widow of John Lowe, [...] Governess of the workhouse at £25 per annum.

This arrangement continued until 1788 when Robert Oddie was appointed Superintendent of the workhouse and then treasurer (in 1789) at a salary of 100 guineas per annum. (No rent was paid or even a lease made out for the building until 1796, at which date a lease was completed for 1,000 years at a cost of £4,000).

The completed Institution is shown in a woodcut of 1779 by P.P.Burdett depicting a pauper family being directed to the workhouse by a gentleman.¹¹ Some time later, but before 1810, Troughton produced a woodcut of the Workhouse which shows a similar view but with the addition of a front brick wall and metal railings.¹²

8 Minutes of the Annual Vestry, April 1769. LRO.

9 Brooks was a great success during his 20 years as treasurer until his death in 1788. The Vestry commissioned a portrait of Brooks from Richard Caddick to be hung in the Parish offices.

10 Minutes of the Annual Vestry, April 1779. LRO.

11 P.P.Burdett, 'The North Front of the Poor House', woodcut, 1779. LRO.

12 T.Troughton, 'View of the Liverpool Work-House, or House of Industry'. Special Collections and Archives, Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool.

Only a few years after the workhouse was completed it was recorded that a House of Correction¹³

shall be forthwith erected upon Brownlow Hill, near the present Poor House ...

At the same Special Vestry Meeting of 1776 it was agreed that

Mr. John Shortcliffe, surgeon, be continued in his office of Parish Surgeon and Apothecary, to visit the sick poor of the Parish under the direction of the Magistrates, Church Wardens, and Overseers of the Poor during the year ensuing, and that he be paid the sum of eighty guineas for such duty by the Treasurer.

The following year (1777) it was found necessary to increase the size of the workhouse and six houses were added to the south-east wing in the early part of the year; by the end of November a further six houses had been added to the south-west wing. This building boom was continued the next year with the addition of a public dispensary (completed in 1780) for a resident apothecary. In addition to the dispensary, a further four houses (completed by 1786) acted as hospitals for casual paupers and a lunatic asylum (built by public subscription) was completed in 1787.¹⁴

In a map of 1785 by Charles Eyes¹⁵ are shown the Poor House and the Quarry adjacent on the eastern side. Next to the Quarry is the House of Correction. Over to the top right-hand corner is an area of land called the 'Rector's Five Fields' purchased for the sum of £200 in 1728.¹⁶ The stone

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- 13 Minutes of the Special Vestry Meeting, 9 February 1776. LRO. When Edward VI (1537-53) presented his house at Bridewell to the City of London in 1553 for use as a 'house of correction', its future inmates were described as 'the thriftless poor, thus:- 1 The rioter, that consumeth all. 2 The vagabond, that will abide in no place. 3 The idle person, as dissolute women and others'. Bridewell House was to shelter those people and make them work for their keep. By the end of the 1600s, 'Bridewell' had become a generic name for an establishment where inmates were working partly for their keep and partly as a punishment. By the middle 1700s, the Bridewells were more like a gaol where inmates were forced to work as a punishment.
- 14 The asylum was built on the site where the old Physics Department of the University of Liverpool had its Laboratory and Offices, on the north side of the University quadrangle behind the red-brick Victoria Building on Brownlow Hill.
- 15 Charles Eyes, *A Plan of the Town and Township of Liverpool, from a survey of 1785* (Liverpool: Scouse Press, 1966).
- 16 In response to a 1786 Governmental Select Committee request for details of legacies and bequests to the poor, a list was made by the Annual Vestry of that year entitled 'Answers returned to the Questions in Schedule annexed from the Parish and Towne Corporate of

from the quarry was used for road-making and building, and the Rector's Fields produced vegetables for the Workhouse and the other Establishments. A number of woodcut illustrations made some time between 1790 and 1810 by Troughton, show the Fever Ward (completed 1801), the Public Infirmary and the Dispensary, Church Street.¹⁷ The eventual building of the fever ward came about only because of the persistence of Dr James Currie (1756-1805) who, at the Vestry Meeting of 1797, finally obtained a recommendation 'for the purpose of taking into consideration the necessity of making or building a more commodious Fever ward than the present either within or without the walls of the Workhouse'. Building was delayed by the financial restrictions of the French War and opposition from ratepayers; minor alterations were made to the House of Correction to house fever patients but the new fever ward was not completed until 1801. Currie was instrumental in establishing the Lunatic Asylum in connection with the Infirmary and did much good work in Liverpool.

On the death of Brooks, the well-liked and efficient treasurer, Richard Oddie was appointed his successor by the Annual Vestry. Oddie proved to be very different from Brooks and his appointment marked the rise to power of the Churchwardens and their control of the Overseers. The Churchwardens were members of the various Standing Committees associated with the Workhouse and were in a position to negotiate with the Corporation for contracts to supply foodstuffs and building maintenance, implements and clothing. They were empowered to prosecute felons, audit accounts and give grants to Churches for building maintenance. They also had power in the administration of the Poor Law. Among the responsibilities of the Vestry, at that time, were the prevention of crime, fire extinction, public health and the cleansing and repair of the streets.

The following years, up to the turn of the century, were a time of great and increasing wealth for a few Liverpoolians. However, it was also a time of great hardship for many of the working people, particularly the dock-dependent labourers, as the French, and other, port blockades reduced the amount of trade in the Liverpool docks. The numbers of paupers were increasing annually. By the 1790s, the number accommodated in the Workhouse was about 1,000 (with

Liverpool in the Hundred of West Derby, in the County of Lancaster, the twenty-seventh day of October 1786'. Tenth on the list of twenty-five different legacies and bequests is one dated 16 March 1728, '... with which joint sum have been purchased those five fields near Moss Lake, commonly called or known by the name of the Rector's Five Fields'. These fields corresponded roughly with the area bounded by the present Myrtle St, Almond St, Faulkner St and Bloom St.

17 T.Troughton, 'View of the Fever Ward'; 'View of the Public Infirmary'; 'View of the Dispensary, Church Street'. Special Collections and Archives, Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool.

approximately 200 paupers in various Almshouses) and the Annual Vestry ordered further extensions to the Workhouse buildings which were completed in 1792. According to the Parish Committee Minutes of 19 July 1796, the workhouse was further enlarged in 1796.¹⁸

In 1804, Mr Hardman was appointed Governor of the Brownlow Hill Workhouse and shortly afterwards came a series of Reports made to the Annual Vestry. In Churchwarden Henderson's Report it was stated that married couples lived in small houses separate from the main building,¹⁹

...but separation of the adults from children, of the criminal from the unfortunate, of the prostitutes from the respectable women, required more space than the Vestry could command. In this respect the Liverpool Workhouse was no worse, and probably much better than nine out of every ten in the Kingdom.

Work was required from all inmates under eighty years of age who were not sick. Henderson's report shows that out of 1,600 paupers (not all of whom were in the Workhouse — some were supported in almshouses and elsewhere) only 20 were able-bodied men. More than a third were under 15 years old and as many again were over 50; only 377 were between the ages of 15 and 50. Those unable to work due to sickness or infirmity numbered 437, and 430 children were too young to be employed (these were mainly the paupers' offspring).²⁰

Peet describes the situation obtaining in 1813 in graphic terms:

... the condition of the poor in Liverpool was desperate. Prices rose and wages fell. The vast expenditure on the War drained the blood of industry and the enemies' ships and the Orders in Council combined to choke the foreign trade of the Town. Dock labourers, porters and carters were thrown out of work in hundreds. The Irish found Liverpool less dreadful than their own country, and the stream of immigration never ceased. Bad houses, bad drainage and an enormous number of public-houses drove the people into the abyss of misery and degradation. There were 1,300 paupers in the workhouse, and 8,000 on the streets. One inhabitant in every ten received parochial relief in one form or another. ... But upon the top of distress came mal-administration and the Parish abandoned carefulness and economy

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- 18 Minutes of the Annual Vestry, 1796. LRO.
- 19 Mr Churchwarden Henderson, 'Report to the Annual Vestry, 1805', Minutes of the Annual Vestry, 1805. LRO.
- 20 The Brownlow Hill Workhouse was also to some extent a technical school where some of the poor children of the town were able to receive instruction in a trade. Children in their first year received 1s. per week, second year children (after gaining a certain proficiency) 1s.6d. per week. After two years they received 1s.6d. plus the normal diet of the Workhouse.

at a time when there was more need for both than at any other period of its existence.

Newspapers of the time give vivid accounts of the poverty and degradation on the streets of Liverpool.²¹

In hindsight it appears that the administration of the welfare of the local poor began to be too much for the existing administrators and the records show many abuses of the system occurring. Examples of financial irregularities on the part of the Churchwardens and Overseers were given by Joseph Dutton to the 1816 Annual Vestry Meeting. It emerged that in the previous year £11,000 had been spent in collecting £28,000 of Parish money, contracts had been awarded for unnecessary ornamental works and lavish dinners had been given at the Workhouse for Parish officials. Dutton also considered that there were too many officials in a top heavy bureaucracy. The Annual Vestry of 1816 compounded their errors by appointing John Dennison as the Senior Churchwarden. He was a headstrong and arrogant man who disobeyed express orders from the Vestry. Amongst more serious financial irregularities, it was found that he had presented umbrellas to a number of the town surveyors, half-a-dozen fine lace hats for ladies (plus hatbands for the men) at a Mr Barrow's funeral, and that he had later paid 5s. (all this out of pauper funds) for Mrs Taylor's pudding receipt for Christmas. Dennison was not relieved of his post until 1826.

A Select Committee of the House of Commons reported in 1817 that the administration of the Poor Law had broken down nationally. They found that, amongst other things, relief was distributed without investigation and without limit. Monies were paid out of Parish funds to make up the deficiency in wages and employers profited at the expense of the public. Mr Sturges Bourne, MP, brought in two acts of parliament²² as a result of which permanent salaried officials were appointed for the first time and 'Select Vestries' were to be chosen by the ratepayers. (The main difference between the Annual Vestry and this Select Vestry was that the Select Vestry had the backing of statutory power). On 10 May 1821, after some disagreements, a Select Vestry of 16 was elected in the Parish of Liverpool. It consisted of the Rector, Churchwardens, Overseers of the Poor and owners of property of an assessed value of £50 or more per annum.

The first task of the Select Vestry was to attempt to check the corruption that was rife in the parish. They appointed an accountant named Edwards to

21 For example, *Liverpool Mercury*, 23 April 1813.

22 58 Geo. 3, c 69; 59 Geo. 3, c 12.

check the record books.

His unfavourable report noted the following:²³

- a. Churchwardens were guilty of extravagance and unnecessary expenditure
- b. Payment of accounts and salaries was made by the Treasurer without the written authority of the Churchwardens
- c. Churchwardens had habitually paid large sums to parish officers without requiring regular accounts
- d. Expenditure on wine and spirits was excessive

In addition

... the accounts were confused and irregular to a degree, calculated to admit of great loss, profligate expenditure, and even designed frauds.

It seems that whole streets had been overlooked in the assessment for the poor rate and only one third of those houses assessed had actually paid up. (The lack of monies available for pauper relief was reflected in attitudes towards the poor). Abuses in poor rate distribution were numerous. Persons to whom relief had been granted in cases such as temporary illness or child-birth, had remained on the books for as long as thirty years. This 1822 report of Edwards identified abuses that twelve years later were pinpointed and condemned nationwide by the Poor Law Commissioners.

The year prior to this report, in 1821, the newly formed Select Vestry had ordered that pecuniary relief was only to be granted 'in cases of occasional and temporary emergence', and that men were to be employed in making roads, cultivating the piece of ground known as the 'Rector's Fields', stone-cutting in the Brownlow Hill Quarry, or breaking stones for the highways. Children of the outdoor poor were to be employed in pin-making or in weaving and many children were apprenticed to local manufacturers and tradespeople. Some of the able-bodied paupers were set to work whitewashing the cellar dwellings of the town. Every able-bodied man, woman and child had to give the parish some return in the form of labour for the money given them for relief. Residence in the Workhouse was also made much less attractive: tobacco and snuff were to be distributed only to the aged, and ale was to be allowed only to nurses and foremen, and given to paupers only in the case of illness. Not surprisingly, there was an immediate drop in the numbers of paupers and a considerable reduction in annual expenditure on relief:

23 Mr Edwards, 'Report to the Select Vestry, 1822', in *Minutes of the Select Vestry, 1822*. LRO.

	EXPENDITURE	INDOOR POOR	OUTDOOR POOR
1819	£21,210	6,410	14,800
1822	£10,395	3,901	6,694
1823	£(much reduced)	1,562	3,553

In the Select Vestry Report of 1823 the following policy was adopted²⁴

... from the conviction that the law does not authorise the providing the poor with anything beyond a sufficiency of plain and wholesome food; consequently that if they allow indulgencies which are not attainable by vast numbers of the industrious and independent poor, they exceed the powers with which they are entrusted as dispensers of the parish funds, and become fairly liable to the charge of offering a direct premium upon pauperism.

In response to some critics who did not approve this strict interpretation of the law, the Select Vestry stated in their Report later that year:²⁵

He who dispenses from the public purse is bound to recollect that the money he bestows on one man has been previously taken from another; that what he is about to confer upon a pauper has been drawn from the earnings, perhaps from the hard and laborious earnings of independent labour; that the existence of Parish rates is in itself an evil, only to be tolerated in the choice of difficulties, consequently that the appropriation of the parish funds, in every instance, can be justified only by the necessity of the case.

In 1834 there were passed the Poor Law Reform Acts²⁶ and Parishes were grouped into Unions. Under these Acts, three Poor Law Commissioners were appointed for England and Wales with Edwin Chadwick, the tireless public health reformer, as their Secretary.

The available records from this period show the need for support and accommodation for paupers exceeding the available facilities, and that in order to reduce the burden on the Parish, great efforts were made to reduce expenditure. Inadequate funding and the unsuitability of petty officials in positions of power gave rise to many documented and horrific excesses. These included the shipping of unwanted pauper children to the Bahamas from St Pancras Workhouse.²⁷ (It is thought that Dickens based the early pages of *Oliver Twist* on

24 Minutes of the Select Vestry, April 1823. LRO.

25 Minutes of the Select Vestry, 25 August 1823. LRO.

26 4 & 5 William 4, c 76.

27 Minutes of the St Pancras Vestry, 1851. Greater London Record Office.

reports of this workhouse).²⁸

It would appear that, although the Workhouse in Liverpool was a dreadful place to be, there were many other workhouses in the country that were far worse. Graphic accounts abound of the inadequate sanitation, heating, diet and ill treatment afforded to inmates and a number of scandals (one concerning Andover Workhouse in the 1830s, for example) were exposed in pamphlets published in the first half of the nineteenth century. Liverpool Brownlow Hill workhouse was itself attacked in a letter published by Thomas Smith in 1832.²⁹ The letter outlines the experience of a member of the regular Liverpool Workhouse Visitors — Mr Overseer Turner — who, not quite satisfied with what he saw on the official conducted tour of the Workhouse, later doubled back. He was pleased to see that in one of the dormitories all appeared in order,

but he happened to turn down one of the beds. The beds were all sham, made up for show; the sheets were all false, and when turned down exhibited a mass of filth and vermin. This induced the Overseer to examine further, and he found not only the beds in this predicament, but the unfortunate individuals who slept in them covered with rags, unwashed, and eaten with disease. There was another ward — the itch ward — and that presented a picture of abomination, cruelty and inhumanity. The children, victims of the disease, sat on the cold floor, in a state of nudity.

In 1841 a Board of Guardians was set up; this was responsible for the administration of the Poor Law at local level right up to 1929. In 1842 an act of parliament was passed which placed the administration in the hands of the Select Vestry, deemed to be the Board of Guardians and subject to the Poor Law Commissioners.³⁰

The Brownlow Hill Workhouse by this time was almost a self-contained, walled-in village with its own bakery, kitchens, stables and styes. In the Minutes of the Weekly Workhouse Committee Meeting for 12 May 1842 is recorded the resolution that all bones, pig bristles and other articles then considered the prerequisites of the cooks, pigmen and others, should be sold

28 Richard Conquest, 'The Black Hole of St Pancras; the Workhouse and its inmates', in *Camden History Review*, no. 3 (Camden History Society, 1975).

29 Thomas Smith, *A Letter to the Rate-Payers and other Inhabitants of Liverpool on the Internal Management of that Fair-Looking Concern, the Workhouse of their Parish, to which are subjoined, the Report of the Committee of the Select Vestry, and the Statement of Mr. Overseer Turner, on the same Subject, pub. by the Author, 17 Lord Street, Liverpool, 13 June, 1832.* Special Collections and Archives, Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool.

30 5 & 6 Victoria, c 88. L. & P., 1842.

and brought to the house account; in lieu, a sum not exceeding £20 per annum would be distributed to the involved parties. At the same Committee meeting, the level of relief given to residents on leaving the house is revealed:

Outdoor relief of 7/6d per week to Amelia Thornton plus bed and blankets on leaving the House with her three children,
Outdoor relief to Sarah Downes of 1/- per week.

The weekly Workhouse minutes of 26 May 1842 show that in the previous six months, two lunatics had escaped by the same route from the workhouse lunatic asylum

... by climbing to the top of a House in Duckinfield Street and thence down by the spout, the former escape being attended with fatal consequences by falling from the Hall over which he was escaping. ... the only persons in charge of the asylum as keepers are paupers, unacquainted with the proper treatment of Lunatics and moreover subject to frequent change.

With the numbers of paupers escalating, and about 1-2% of the Liverpool population needing some sort of Parish accommodation in the early to middle 1800s, the Brownlow Hill Workhouse was enlarged by an Order of the Poor Law Commissioners dated 31 May 1845.³¹ The work was to be completed within eighteen months and to cost no more than £46,000. The Select Vestry minutes between 1845 and 1846 show that, in fact, the workhouse was completely re-built. (A chapel was subsequently erected in 1855 and a hospital 'for the reception of poor persons suffering from infectious diseases' in 1863).

In an attempt to standardise workhouse conditions, *Rules of the Workhouse* were circulated by the Poor Law Commissioners in the 1840s to all Boards of Guardians. These stated that paupers might be admitted by

Order of the Select Vestry
Order of the relieving officer or overseer of the Poor
Order of the Master of the Workhouse (*in absentia* of the Matron)

On admission, the pauper was to be placed in the receiving ward, cleansed, clothed in the appropriate Workhouse dress and examined by the Medical Officer who should then assign the pauper to the appropriate part of the Workhouse according to the class to which the pauper belonged. Apart from married couples who had sleeping accommodation separate from the rest, paupers was divided into seven classes:

31 The Poor Law Commissioners were re-organised in 1847 to become the Poor Law Board which was only dissolved in 1919 on the formation of the Ministry of Health.

- Class 1. Men infirm through age or any other cause
- Class 2. Able-bodied men, and youths above the age of 15 years
- Class 3. Boys above the age of 7 years, and under that of 15
- Class 4. Women infirm through age or any other cause
- Class 5. Able-bodied women, and girls above the age of 15 years
- Class 6. Girls above the age of 7 years, and under that of 15
- Class 7. Children under 7 years of age

'Class 4' might be 'deemed fit to perform the duties of a nurse or assistant to the Matron'; 'Class 5 & 6' might be

employed constantly or occasionally as assistants to the nurses in any of the sick wards, or in the care of infants, or as assistants in the household work.

The casual poor way-farers and vagrants admitted by the master or matron of the workhouse shall be kept in the vagrant ward, or other separate ward ..., and shall be dieted and set to work in such a manner and under such regulations as the Select Vestry shall ... direct.

No pauper was to receive payment for work done for the workhouse, and boys and girls

... shall for three of the working hours, be instructed in reading, writing, arithmetic and the Principles of the Christian Religion.

A contemporary (but squeaky clean) account describes the Brownlow Hill Workhouse in the following terms:³²

Order and industry prevail, and every attention is paid to ventilation, cleanliness, and proper dieting of the inmates. The building is in the Elizabethan style and has been erected at enormous cost. Besides accommodating the in-door paupers, it has a separate Fever Hospital, Church, and house for the Governor, and a complete set of offices; and a part of it, called the Sheds, is set off for vagrants who may sleep and breakfast there, a small amount of work at their hands being demanded before leaving the premises. ... The inmates of the Workhouse usually number from 2,000 to 2,300 ... about 650 [of whom] are usually sick.

There were frequent serious fever epidemics in Liverpool, as indeed there were elsewhere. These spread rapidly in the overcrowded and squalid parts of big towns and cities. Cholera and typhus fever were the most prevalent. The following table shows some of the main outbreaks in Liverpool during the

32 Dr Thomas Held, 'Liverpool of Today. A Guide to the Town and its vicinity on both shores of the Mersey', in *Liverpool Pamphlets, 1766-1849* (1859). Special Collections and Archives, Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool.

middle 1800s:

DATE	FEVER
1832	(world wide pandemic of cholera)
1837	Typhus Fever
1839	Typhus Fever
1839	Smallpox
1847	Typhus Fever
1849	Cholera
1854	Cholera
1866	Cholera

The Liverpool philanthropist, William Rathbone (1819-1902) and his wife, Lucretia (who died in 1859), were able to put pressure on the Select Vestry of the Parish to use trained nurses in the Brownlow Hill Workhouse rather than rely on untrained pauper women and girls. He invited Agnes Jones, a product of the Nightingale Fund School at St Thomas's Hospital, to superintend the Nursing Duties at the Workhouse Hospital. She arrived in 1865 and shortly afterwards brought to Liverpool a staff of twelve nurses and seven probationers (all trained at the same London school). This pilot study — funded by Rathbone and the first of its kind — was a great success and paved the way for similar schemes nationwide. Agnes Jones died of typhus only a few years later in 1868, but her efforts at Liverpool in caring for the sick poor resulted in much improved nursing not only in Liverpool but nationwide.³³ A Workhouse Nurses Association was formed a short time after Agnes Jones's death.

The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of steady reform and improvement in the provision of relief for the poor and the sick poor. Workhouses and workhouse hospitals were still places of dread amongst many of the labouring classes, but the atrocious conditions of the first part of the century were, as 1900 approached, disappearing due in part to philanthropic benevolence and to better medical knowledge and practice. A Central Administration Board with Annual National, and District, Conferences on the Poor Law enabled up-to-date information and practices to be disseminated throughout the country. Nursing provision in the Workhouse Hospitals improved dramatically towards the turn of the century when trained nurses were employed who later became the bedrock of hospital care.

The last infant was born in the Brownlow Hill Workhouse Hospital in September 1928 and the nine acre site was put up for sale by auction on 26

33 J. Cosbie Ross and John Ross, *A Gifted Touch; A Biography of Agnes Jones* (Worthing: Churchman Publishing, 1988), pp. 27-49.

March 1930.³⁴ The land was acquired by the Roman Catholic Church and subsequently became the site of the magnificent Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, to be seen on the other side of the road to the Liverpool Medical Institution.

34 Personal communication from Mrs Scarisbrick, Archivist to the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King.