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The Implementation of the Poor Law in the Basingstoke Union, North  
Hampshire,  
c.1870 – 1900

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## ABSTRACT

From 1834 the New Poor Law was a key provider of state-funded welfare for the very poor in nineteenth-century society, but the final three decades of the century have received less attention from historians than the period prior to 1870. This study examines the implementation of the Poor Law by the Board of Guardians in the rural union of Basingstoke, North Hampshire during those final decades and asks to what extent the guardians embraced, or resisted, changes in central government welfare policies. Recent scholarship has highlighted the importance and impact of the policy in retrenchment known as the ‘Crusade against outdoor relief’ as a radical change within the Poor Law during the late-century period, as well as the development of specialized care for certain categories of workhouse inmates. A lack of detailed study on the guardians who ran the poor law at the local level during this time has also been noted. Using a complete set of Minutes books for the board meetings of the guardians and reports from local newspapers, this study considers the role of the guardians before moving on to consider their responses firstly to the ‘crusade’ and then to policies on the introduction of specialized treatment in the workhouse. In addition, figures recorded in the Minutes books are analysed to gauge the impact of the Basingstoke guardians’ implementation of these late-century policies. The study concludes that the Basingstoke Board of Guardians generally sought to comply with national policy, but their response was qualified by a reluctance to commit to large-scale expenditure and difficulties arising from local circumstances. Yet, the Basingstoke Board made significant changes in the delivery of poor relief during the final decades of the nineteenth century. The evidence from this rural union contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the New Poor Law system during the final three decades of the nineteenth century.

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Karen Hobbs  
Dissertation

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work and that I have not submitted it, or any part of it, for a degree at The Open University or at any other university or institution. Parts of this dissertation are built on work I submitted for assessment as part of A825.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1872, the Board of Guardians of the Basingstoke Poor Law Union in North Hampshire voted to introduce a new set of rules for the administration of outdoor relief. These rules remained in force until well into the final decade of the nineteenth century. This study examines the implementation of the Poor Law in the Basingstoke Union between 1870 and 1900. It will consider to what extent did the Guardians embraced reform, or were opponents to change, in their responses to central government social policies during this period? Who were the Guardians and how did their role develop during the final three decades of the nineteenth century? How did the delivery of poor relief change during this period and what were the consequences for the poor?

The implementation of relief policies in the Basingstoke Union will be explored through the surviving documentation of the Union held in the Hampshire Archives. The key sources are the Guardians Minutes books between 1870 and 1900 allowing changing policy decisions of the Board of Guardians to be traced over this period. Document survival for Hampshire poor law unions in the late nineteenth-century is patchy, but fortunately the Basingstoke books are complete and legible with no interruptions, or damaged pages.<sup>1</sup> No other documents for the Basingstoke Union exist for this period, but a few documents survive relating the Board's activities as the rural sanitary authority and are useful in demonstrating the expanding role of the guardians during the late-century. In addition, samples of data will be collected for a ten year period when the Board recorded the numbers of outdoor paupers and analysed to show

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<sup>1</sup> Hampshire Record Office (HRO): Documents for the neighbouring union of Alton are listed in the catalogue, but not available due to their fragile condition.

the impact of the retrenchment policy on those receiving outdoor relief during the 1870s and 1880s. Some workhouse inmates can be identified from the Minutes books and the periodic returns for the Census. Also, two notebooks from the workhouse master in the late 1890s provide some interesting details about officials. The lack of records has been overcome to a certain extent by information gathered from correspondence sent by the Basingstoke Board to the Poor Law authorities in London. These letters show the local version of events presented to central government, yet they are annotated with comments from officials that can shed further light upon the issues being faced by the Board. Sadly, official correspondence from London to all poor law unions was destroyed by fire during the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

Identifying the poor has proved to be challenging, since entries in the Minutes books provide limited details, but it has been possible to trace the encounters of some individuals with the authorities in applying for poor relief.

Local Newspapers, accessible through the British Newspaper Archive database, are useful in providing additional details about the guardians, local events and occasionally the poor who came into contact with poor law officials. At this time Basingstoke was served by two county newspapers, but the greatest coverage was provided by newspapers in Reading located only twelve miles north. A town newspaper did not appear until the 1880s and full access to Board meetings was not granted until the mid-1890s. However, the proprietor of the Basingstoke newspaper became a guardian in the 1890s and helped to ensure extensive coverage of Board meetings at a crucial period for developments in the workhouse. National government policy on poor relief can be determined from the annual reports of the Local Government Board, and its predecessors, through the UK Parliamentary Papers online

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<sup>2</sup> 'Poor Law Records', *Discovery* <<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>> [accessed 10 October 2018].

database. In addition, historical directories are useful in providing information about local elites, officials and traders, plus data about many of the villages that occupied the rural areas of the union. The poor generated very few documents for themselves at this time, so it is necessary to rely upon the ‘top-down’ records, mentioned above, to gauge the impact of the implementation of poor law policy in the Basingstoke area.

There is considerable diversity of opinion amongst historians about the success, or failure, of the New Poor Law, but there is a general consensus that the implementation of the system varied greatly across England and Wales<sup>3</sup>. Traditionally, the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 was viewed as a radical break with the Old Poor Law system, but a more recent study in Norfolk suggests that there was considerable continuity in the relief of poverty at the local level between the Old and New Poor Laws.<sup>4</sup> Michael Rose accepted the existence of continuity at the local level, but stated that the reform plans for the New Poor Law were not fully implemented after 1834 and the system was remade during the late-century based upon principles that harked back to 1834 ethos.<sup>5</sup> Rose sought to contradict a “Whig theory of welfare” that the institutions of the New Poor Law became the basis of the welfare state with a smooth transition into the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> A few historians including Mary MacKinnon and Karel Williams called for a revision of the thinking that the ‘crusade against outdoor relief’ was insignificant and merely a return to the ideology of the 1834 Act.<sup>7</sup> Williams

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Lawrence, ‘Block 6: Poverty and Welfare, *A825 MA History Part 1* (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2009), p. 22. Scotland and Ireland had independent Poor Law systems.

<sup>4</sup> David Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain, 1834-1914: From Chadwick to Booth* (London: Pearson 1998; repr. Routledge 2013), p. 82; Anne Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> Michael E. Rose, ‘The Crisis of Poor Relief in England 1860-1890’, in *The Emergence of the Welfare State in Britain and Germany*, ed. by W.J. Mommsen and Wolfgang Mock (London: Croom Helm, 1981), pp. 50-70.

<sup>6</sup> Rose, p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> Mary MacKinnon, ‘English Poor Law Policy and the Crusade Against Outrelief’, *Journal of Economic History*, 47 (1987) 603-627; Karel Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

argued that the ‘crusade’ represented a radical change in policy negating the notion of smooth transition in welfare policy.<sup>8</sup> MacKinnon noted that the ‘crusade’ had received little attention from historians and emphasized the importance of the impact upon the poor as restrictions on outdoor relief were widely tightened after 1870.<sup>9</sup> The revisionist perspective challenges the earlier notion that the ethos of the Poor Law remained largely unchanged during the late-century.

Williams and MacKinnon based their studies on central government statistics, but recently some historians have started to explore the implementation of the Poor Law at the local level during the late nineteenth century. Elizabeth Hurren also called attention to a gap in poor law historiography with many earlier studies concentrating on events before 1870 and then after 1900.<sup>10</sup> Hurren’s case study of the Brixworth Union in Northamptonshire demonstrated how the severity of the ‘crusade against outdoor relief’ provoked a significant political reaction amongst agricultural labourers in the 1890s.<sup>11</sup> The study looked at a ‘model’ crusading union in a rural context in contrast to previous work that focused upon urban areas.<sup>12</sup> Neil Quinn’s study of the Lancaster guardians provides some contrast to Hurren’s work, because he found that the guardians were reluctant to make changes even though they did implement the ‘crusade’ policy during the 1870s.<sup>13</sup> However, Steven King’s study of female guardians in

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<sup>8</sup> Williams, p. 99.

<sup>9</sup> MacKinnon, p.624.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth T Hurren, ‘Labourers are Revolting: Penalising the Poor and a Political Reaction in the Brixworth Union, Northamptonshire, 1875-1885’, *Rural History*, 11 (2000), 37-55 (p. 51).

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth T Hurren, *Protesting About Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late-Victorian England 1870-1900* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Alan Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Neil Quinn, ‘Men of Yesterday: Lancaster Poor Law Union, 1870-1911’, *Family & Community History*, 18 (2015), 3-23.

Bolton introduces evidence for reforming guardians during the late-century.<sup>14</sup> This focus on poor law guardians is interesting, because a recent study has noted that comparatively little is known about how this group of people operated under the New Poor Law.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Andy Croll's study of the 'crusade' in Wales contradicted earlier assessments that few Welsh unions adopted the retrenchment policies and underlines the wide spread impact of the 'crusade' at this time.<sup>16</sup> In general, the literature on outdoor relief has not been matched by studies of workhouses during the same late-century period, in part because historians have focused upon particular categories of workhouse inmates. Alistair Ritch focused upon the care of elderly and maintained that the Birmingham workhouse was an important provider of care to the aged and sick poor, while Angela Negrine looked at the care of sick children in Leicester suggesting a new approach in the institutional care of children.<sup>17</sup> Studies from earlier time periods, including one mid-century study of Basingstoke, and general surveys of the poor law will be used to gauge the extent of change in the Basingstoke workhouse at this time.<sup>18</sup>

The implementation of the New Poor Law during the final three decades of the nineteenth century has been less extensively covered than the period prior to 1870s. This study seeks to add to the growing literature addressing this historiographical gap and taking a revisionist

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<sup>14</sup> Steven King, "'We Might Be Trusted: Female Poor Law Guardians and the Development of the New Poor Law: The Case of Bolton, 1880-1906', *International Review of Social History*, 49 (2004), 27-46.

<sup>15</sup> Karen Rothery, Abstract of "'Who do They Think They are?": An Analysis of the Board of Guardians in Hertfordshire', *Local Population Studies*, 99 (2017) 20-31.

<sup>16</sup> Andy Croll, "'Reconciled Gradually to the System of Indoor Relief": The Poor Law in Wales during the "Crusade against Out-relief", c.1870-c.1890', *Family & Community History*, 20 (2017), 121-144.

<sup>17</sup> Alistair Ritch, 'English Poor Law Institutional Care for Older People: Identifying the 'Aged and Infirm' and the 'Sick' in Birmingham Workhouse, 1852-1912', *Social History of Medicine*, 27 (2013), 64-85; Angela Negrine, 'The Treatment of Sick Children in the Workhouse by the Leicester Poor Law Union, 1867-1914', *Family & Community*, 13 (2010), 34-44.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Hinde and Fiona Turnbull, 'The Population of Two Hampshire Workhouses, 1851-1861', *Local Population Studies*, 61 (1998), 38-53; Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers*; Norman Longmate, *The Workhouse: A Social History* (Temple Smith, 1974; London: Pimlico, 2003).

approach to late-century welfare policies. The chapters will consider firstly the role and character of the local Board of guardians, secondly the implementation of policies for outdoor relief and finally specialized treatment for certain categories of workhouse inmates. It adds to some recent work by introducing the perspective of a rural union in the south of England with the intention of widening the understanding of how Boards of Guardians implemented the New Poor Law during the late-century. It will be argued that the Basingstoke Board were cautious reformers and implemented some significant changes in the delivery of poor relief in the Basingstoke area of North Hampshire.

## Chapter 2: The Board of Guardians

This chapter will explore who were the Poor Law Guardians in the Basingstoke Union and how their role developed during the late nineteenth century. It will seek to establish what kind of backgrounds many of the guardians were drawn from and how social connections between individual guardians impacted upon the operation of the Board of guardians. Then the chapter will examine how the role and responsibilities of the guardians developed during this period with regards to the local community and the poor. Lastly, it will consider how the Board was effected by national legislation, in particular the 1894 Local Government Act. It will be shown that changes in the membership of the Board of guardians and its responsibilities were driven largely by central government policies, but local initiatives also played a role.

The Board of Guardians were responsible by the 1860s for implementing the policies of the Poor Law Board, and from 1871 the Local Government Board (LGB), within the Basingstoke Union. It was the Board of Guardians that levied and collected the poor rates, and then determined upon relief of the local poor either within the workhouse, or by outdoor relief to those living in the community. The Basingstoke Board comprised 43 annually-elected guardians, one guardian for each of the 37 rural parishes, with four for the town of Basingstoke and two for Old Basing, the next largest settlement.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Board included up to twelve *ex-officio* guardians co-opted from magistrates on the Basingstoke division of the County Bench. After the Local Government Act 1894 all the guardians were elected annually, since the property qualifications to be a guardian, or indeed a voter, in

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<sup>1</sup> William White's *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight* (White, 1878) p 130.

guardian elections were removed. The property qualification ensured that guardians were affluent members of the community and all men in the Basingstoke Union until the mid-1890s. The position conferred a degree of social status within the local community and was included in achievements of local worthies in newspaper death notices. In 1888, a description of the funeral of Edward Read, a farmer, noted he was “many years” a guardian in the Basingstoke Union.<sup>2</sup> On his death, the Rev John Keate was described as a “useful member” of the Board who had only vacated the position of vice-chairman after many years because of “physical infirmity”.<sup>3</sup> While Sir Nelson Rycroft was described as a popular resident of North Hampshire who “took a deep interest in all matters affecting his locality” being an active member, and former chairman, of the Basingstoke Board of guardians.<sup>4</sup> The Board of Guardians were affluent men with a degree of social status within the local community for much of this period.

In 1886, the Minutes of the Guardians’ board meeting recorded a letter from Geoge Sclater-Booth thanking the Board of Guardians for their letter of condolence on the death of his father, and former Chairman, William Sclater. The letter noted that nothing in his father’s long career of more than four decades as magistrate and guardian had given him “greater satisfaction” than serving as Chairman of the Board of Guardians.<sup>5</sup> This record provides evidence for both the closely-connected world and continuity of membership amongst the Basingstoke guardians. Sclater-Booth was the local Member of Parliament and like his father a poor law guardian, although in the neighbouring union of Odiham. The Minutes books show that two contemporary Basingstoke guardians of his father, William Chute and Francis

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<sup>2</sup> *Hampshire Chronicle*, Saturday 20 October 1888, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Hampshire and Berkshire Gazette*, Saturday 7 July 1894, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Reading Mercury*, Saturday 30 March 1894, p.7.

<sup>5</sup> Hampshire Record Office (HRO): Guardians Minutes book, 1 January 1886 (PL 3/5/18).

Jervoise, were followed by their sons onto the Basingstoke Board in the 1880s. All of these men qualified to be *ex-officio* guardians, because they had been appointed magistrates to the County Bench. Such appointments were made by the Lord Lieutenant on recommendation, thus perpetuating the circle of “magnates, squires, beneficed clergy” and leading manufacturers that formed the county elite.<sup>6</sup> The son of William Chute married Eleanor Portal daughter to Wyndham Portal, a director of the local railway company, and brother-in-law to William Beach MP, both men were long-serving guardians on the Basingstoke Board.<sup>7</sup> Family connections and nepotism were not exclusive to the *ex-officio* guardians, since brothers Henry and Edmund Portsmouth, both farmers, were long-serving guardians and Henry’s son Richard became a guardian in the 1890s.<sup>8</sup> The elected guardians belonged to a lower social strata than the *ex-officio* guardians, but there were connections between the two groups. Henry Portsmouth was a landowner as well as renting land from the Chute family, and working for them as a land surveyor.<sup>9</sup> Also the Portsmouth brothers and five other elected guardians are listed attending a meeting of the Conservative Association alongside *ex-officio* guardians Sir Nelson Rycroft, Sclater-Booth and Beach.<sup>10</sup> Religion as well as politics provided an important link between the groups of guardians, in particular the Church of England, and Chaloner Chute was a churchwarden alongside George Matthews, a tenant and fellow guardian.<sup>11</sup> The connections between the guardians and long periods of service helped to ensure continuity in the membership of the board and arguably conservative social attitudes. Continuity of membership may have been a common feature of many boards of guardians, since Neil Quinn found guardians in the Lancaster Union in north-west England

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<sup>6</sup> H.J. Hanham, *Elections and Party Management: Politics in the time of Disraeli and Gladstone*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (1978; repr. Brighton: EER,2017), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *The Vyne* (National Trust, 1998); *The Times*, Saturday 16 September 1905, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> *Berkshire Chronicle*, Saturday 2 May 1868, p3; HRO: Minutes,17 April 1896 (PL 3/5/22)

<sup>9</sup> HRO: Diary of Chaloner W. Chute concerning the Vyne estate, 1879-92 (31M57/1074).

<sup>10</sup> *Berkshire Chronicle*, Saturday 27 April 1884, p.8.

<sup>11</sup> HRO: Chute (31M57/1074)

also served for long terms.<sup>12</sup> The Basingstoke Union guardians were closely connected, belonging to the restricted circles of the gentry and local elites.

The *ex-officio* guardians exercised considerable influence over the administration of the Poor Law in the Basingstoke Union, as the Minutes books reveal they always held the position of Chairman and often Vice-Chairman too. In addition, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Board were invariably the chairman and deputy of the standing committees such as the finance and general purposes (house) committee. In 1869, Wyndham Portal, then Vice-Chairman, made a speech to the Churchman's Association about helping the poor in which he deplored the increasing dependency of labourers upon state assistance and argued that the poor should be educated to "make provision themselves" for the future.<sup>13</sup> He was convinced that local wages are "sufficient to support a family" and poverty resulted from moral weakness, and a view also taken by many contemporaries.<sup>14</sup> The moral improvement of the poor through strict "enforcement of the principles of 1834" helped inspire a central government policy to reduce outdoor relief costs and the establishment of the Charity Organisation Society (COS), an influential society at this time.<sup>15</sup> In 1869, Portal warned the Board about the increasing sums spent on outdoor relief and two years later advocated tighter control over granting of such relief. Portal and Sir Nelson Rycroft, the Chairman, were both members of committee set up by the Board to investigate the Union's practises on outdoor

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<sup>12</sup> Neil Quinn, 'Men of Yesterday: Lancaster Poor Law Union, 1870 -1911', *Family & Community History*, 18 (2015) 3-23.

<sup>13</sup> HRO: Wyndham S. Portal, *The Poor and How to Help Them*, (Churchman's Association, 1869), p.4. (38M89/G7).

<sup>14</sup> HRO: Portal, (38M89/G7) pp. 14-5; Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 245. Portal's speech was set against a background of an urban crises for poor relief during the 1860s that prompted fears of an urban underclass amongst the poor, the "residuum", that would corrupt respectable workers.

<sup>15</sup> David Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain, 1834-1914* (London: Pearson, 1998; Routledge, 2013), p. 21.

relief and recommended new rules to restrict the granting of outdoor relief that were adopted by the Board in April 1872.<sup>16</sup> The Basingstoke Union became part of the ‘crusade against outdoor relief’ a national campaign of retrenchment promoted by the LGB. It is possible that Portal’s views were influenced by George Sclater-Booth MP, a personal friend who lent him ‘Blue Books’ on the national statistics of poor relief before Portal’s 1869 speech.<sup>17</sup> However, Portal told a Poor Law conference in 1872 that he did not agree with the complete removal of outdoor relief, contrary to LGB recommendations, and the Basingstoke rules retained the right to “grant relief in exceptional cases”.<sup>18</sup> This suggests that local decision making was subjective with personal experience forming an important influence. Although Portal retired from the position of Chairman due to a serious illness in 1885, he remained an active member of the Board until the mid-1890s.

The Chairmen and their deputies regularly attended the fortnightly meetings of the Board of Guardians, as evidenced by their signatures in the Minutes books. The Basingstoke records do not include attendance records for individual guardians, however the active members of the Board appear as committee members, or putting forward proposals for Board decisions. The majority of the guardians were rural members including Chaloner Chute, an *ex-officio* guardian, who inherited The Vyne estate just north of the town of Basingstoke. A qualified barrister, Chute had his own opinions on the Poor Law and he had defied the principal speakers at the south east Poor Law Conference in 1875 with a speech advocating the end of the laws of settlement.<sup>19</sup> His diary for The Vyne estate shows that he had personal experience of the agricultural depression in the late-1870s and 1880s, indeed the “home

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<sup>16</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 19 April 1872 (PL3/5/13).

<sup>17</sup> HRO: Portal, (38M89/G7) p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 12 July 1872 (PL3/5/13).

<sup>19</sup> *Reading Mercury*, Saturday 30 October 1875, p.2.

farm” was sold in 1886 and the mansion rented out.<sup>20</sup> Amongst the other rural guardians were many farmers such as Edward Read who was a stockbreeder, described as the only farmer in Nutley parish with a house “finely mantled in ivy”.<sup>21</sup> Richard Easton, who farmed in North Waltham was another long-serving guardian and represented the Board in 1875 at the south-east Poor Law Conference.<sup>22</sup> In addition to the farmers, the other significant occupational group of rural guardians were clergymen. The Rev James Joyce spoke about the management of the workhouse at the first local Poor Law Conference in 1870 and argued poor management was a “blot in English life” which could be overcome with a standing committee of guardians who had regular access to the workhouse.<sup>23</sup> He also recommended establishing a ladies visiting committee to bring “human love and pity” (virtues associated with female philanthropy) into the workhouse.<sup>24</sup> The membership of the Board appears to be similar to other rural unions such as Ludlow which had 22 farmers, “six Anglican clergymen and six gentlemen”.<sup>25</sup> The list of guardians for the Basingstoke Union were not printed in local papers every year, in part because guardian elections were rarely contested within the Union. When positions for Bramley and Basingstoke were contested in 1880, a local newspaper linked the uncontested elections to public apathy as “very few ratepayers ever think about the Board of Guardians”, since only the destitute were eligible for relief from the Board.<sup>26</sup> It is probable that the property qualification and local nepotism restricted the supply of eligible candidates for many parishes so that contests were not necessary. Guardians were often long-serving and returned uncontested in most years during the late century.

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<sup>20</sup> HRO: Chute (31M57/1074).

<sup>21</sup> *White's Directory* (1878), p. 356.

<sup>22</sup> *Reading Mercury*, Saturday 30 October 1875, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Reading Mercury*, Saturday 6 August 1870, p.2.

<sup>24</sup> Alan Kidd, *State, Society and The Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 69-70.

<sup>25</sup> Simon Fowler, *Workhouse: The People, the Places, the Life behind Doors* (Kew: The National Archives, 2007; repr. 2009), p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> *Berkshire Chronicle*, Saturday 10 April 1880, p. 8.

One group of guardians who appear regularly in the Minutes books were the four representatives for the town of Basingstoke and those from the nearest villages Old Basing and Monk Sherbourne. The union workhouse was situated a couple of miles east of the town making attendance at board meetings relatively easy for ‘town guardians’ compared their rural colleagues further away. For much of the period one of the town guardians was a farmer, Henry Portsmouth, and this serves as a reminder that agriculture loomed large in town affairs with farms on its outskirts. However, in the late 1870s his fellow town representatives were James Poulter (upholsterer turned house agent), John Lodwidge (ironmonger) and Henry Jackson (drapery business), who succeeded a timber merchant Robert Davis, evidence of the more varied occupational backgrounds of the town guardians. All of these men served as town councillors at the same time as being poor law guardians and this arrangement was common throughout the period, evidence of the domination of local administration by local elites. In 1892, John Bird who was both a town councillor and guardian made a speech to the London Street Mutual Improvement Society about the Poor Law system.<sup>27</sup> Bird argued the system had two important defects, firstly it was a burden to ratepayers and secondly it had a “demoralising” tendency upon the poor. The latter was the greater evil in Bird’s view, as dependency on state aid discouraged self-reliance in the poor. His remedies included strict administration of relief, restrictions on alcohol, but also encouraging industrial growth in the town to create jobs and lessen the rate burden. Bird’s speech demonstrates the persistence of the moral perception of poverty as a failure of personal character at the local level, although poor law historians have noted that attitudes were changing at the national level.<sup>28</sup> Yet as the founder of the town’s only newspaper the

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<sup>27</sup> *Gazette*, Saturday 19 March 1892, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Lees, p. 242-250.

*Hampshire and Berkshire Gazette*, Bird was instrumental in the introduction of press reporting of the Guardians board meetings. An initial approach in 1882 was ignored, but by the 1890s Bird had become a guardian and he succeeded in obtaining press access to board meetings.<sup>29</sup> The active participation of the ‘town guardians’ gave them influence beyond their rather small numbers on the Board.

During the late nineteenth century, the Basingstoke Board of Guardians generally sought to comply with the directions of central government. Before the mid-1890s, appointing a committee to investigate a particular issue and report back to the main Board, before reaching a consensus seems to have been the preferred decision-making method. However, in the 1890s the guardians experienced serious discord as they struggled to decide whether or not to build a new infirmary.<sup>30</sup> This dispute occurred just as the *Gazette* gained full access to board meetings and it reported verbatim many of the debates amongst the guardians providing valuable evidence of the dispute. In March 1895, the *Gazette* reported that the Board “experienced an unusually lively time” with John Bird and John Morris of Basingstoke advocating a new modern hospital, but Charles Clark, a long-serving rural guardian, leading those who objected to the potential cost as “it would be a serious thing for the land”.<sup>31</sup> Clark was referring to the rating system for the poor rates based upon the value of land which particularly affected large occupiers of land such as farmers and a source of contention between the rural and town guardians. In a later debate, Morris pointed out that although the farmers claimed to pay all the rates, proportionally the railway and the town paid just as much. Also, Rev Canon Willes called for the old isolation hospital to be reused instead of

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<sup>29</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 5 May 1895 (PL3/5/21).

<sup>30</sup> The building of the new infirmary will be discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>31</sup> *Gazette*, Saturday 30 March 1895, p. 3.

spending money on new facilities. He referred to his many years of experience as a guardian compared to the recently appointed Morris, clearly expecting his views to carry more weight and further sign of the tension between traditionalists and more liberal-minded guardians.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the guardians were divided over the urgency to build a hospital with Bird maintaining that there was “no grievance so urgently crying for redress” as replacing the old sick wards in the workhouse that had been condemned by the Poor Law Inspector.<sup>33</sup> He stated that public opinion supported changes in medical care, plus the sick poor were labourers and dependents who had worked all their lives in the area and deserved proper accommodation. The Canon argued that such expense would be premature, because the Poor Law was about to change fundamentally with the aged to be given outdoor relief, or pensions, and live with their families, so reducing the need for a hospital.<sup>34</sup> With arguments over several months, the Board voted initially to build an infirmary and then reversed that decision, before finally deciding to build a new infirmary in 1897.<sup>35</sup> The dispute was rooted in a conflict between an enduring desire to keep the rates low and the increasing numbers of aged and sick inmates in the workhouse, plus pressures to reform medical care in the workhouses emanating from the LGB towards the end of the century.

The participation of the guardians in local government was greatly extended in 1875 when the Board became the Basingstoke Rural Sanitary Authority (BRSA) for the union area, excluding the town borough, with legal obligations to inspect and report on public health matters. The meetings of the BRSA were conducted in the workhouse boardroom immediately after Guardians’ board-meetings with the sanitary authority employing a

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<sup>32</sup> *Gazette*, Saturday 28 September 1895, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> *Gazette*, Saturday 13 April, p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> A reference to the expected publication of the report of the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor 1895.

<sup>35</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 4 May 1897 (PL3/5/22).

medical officer of health and two inspectors of nuisances. A few documents generated by the sanitary authority survive and some are in very poor condition, however a Minutes book 1879 – 1888 provides a useful glimpse of the authority's activities.<sup>36</sup> The authority was concerned with threats to public health and safety, especially the spread of infectious diseases, and in 1881 the medical officer reported that an isolation hospital was urgently needed following an outbreak of smallpox in Mapledurwell, three miles south-east of the town.<sup>37</sup> The Board directed the medical officer to vaccinate the village residents and fumigate cottages, but the isolation hospital was not built until 1885.<sup>38</sup> In addition, the nuisance inspectors surveyed local roads, bridges and water supplies to rural settlements. One report noted that a signpost on the Basingstoke-Andover road had been broken when hit by a horse-drawn waggon loaded with wood, but the waggon owner, Mr Butler of Bury Farm, promised to "make good" the damaged post.<sup>39</sup> It is significant that acting as the BRSA, the guardians were responsible for the health and environment for the entire rural population, not just paupers, but with limited powers of enforcement that relied upon local residents such as Mr Butler to remedy issues with property. The Board's responsibility for rural local government ceased with the establishment of rural district councils in the 1890s, but in practise the guardians became councillors and meetings of the Basingstoke Rural District Council continued in the workhouse boardroom. The activities of the Board as a sanitary authority presents good evidence of the expansion of state during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The Board of Guardians underwent change when the Local Government Act 1894 abolished the property qualification for guardians to create all-elected boards. Although magistrates no

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<sup>36</sup> HRO: Basingstoke Rural Sanitary Authority (BRSA) Minutes book, 1879-88 (68M72/DS1).

<sup>37</sup> HRO: BRSA Minutes book, 5 August 1881 (68M72/DS1).

<sup>38</sup> HRO: Minutes, 16 January 1885 (PL3/5/17).

<sup>39</sup> HRO: BRSA Minutes book, 23 January 1880 (68M72/DS1).

longer automatically qualified as *ex-officio* guardians, in practice the membership of the Basingstoke Board did not greatly change with gentry members such as Sir Richard Rycroft and Arthur Jeffreys MP becoming elected guardians. Importantly, the Board retained its Chairman Francis Jervoise as a co-opted member, since this was permitted by the legislation although not widely used according to Brundage.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Jervoise was unanimously appointed Chairman of the Board every year until his retirement due to ill-health in the early twentieth century, suggesting personal respect for Jervoise rather than reluctance to change. However, the legislation did precipitate a number of local changes in the operation of the Board and its membership. In 1895, the *Gazette* reported that a ballot for the position of vice-chairman and committee members was held “at the suggestion of John Bird” for the first time.<sup>41</sup> In addition, the growth of the town’s population prompted the town council to ask Hampshire County Council (a new authority for electoral matters) for greater representation with 16 guardians on the Board. The town had grown from 5,574 inhabitants in 1871 to 7,960 people in 1891 with over 200 dwellings built.<sup>42</sup> Rev Canon Willes and other rural guardians were alarmed that they might lose their influence on the Board with a “serious disturbance of the proportion fixed by the Act of 1834”, but by the time a vote was taken most guardians had already departed suggesting the Canon represented a small clique of traditional views.<sup>43</sup> The County Council decided to add six new guardians increasing the town total to ten for the 1896 elections and among the newly-elected guardians was the first female guardian Mrs Mitchell.<sup>44</sup> At a national level, the first woman was elected in 1875 and by 1895 there were 875 female guardians across the country, so Basingstoke was

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<sup>40</sup> Anthony Brundage, ‘Reform of the Poor Law Electoral System, 1834-94’, *Albion*, 7 (1975), pp. 201-215, p. 212.

<sup>41</sup> *Gazette*, Saturday 27 April 1895, p.3.

<sup>42</sup> Eric Stokes, *The Making of Basingstoke: From Prehistory to the Present Day*, ed. by Bob and Barbara Applin (Basingstoke: Basingstoke Archaeological & Historical Society, 2008), p. 125.

<sup>43</sup> *Gazette*, Saturday 15 February 1896, p.6.

<sup>44</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 17 April 1896 (PL3/5/22).

following a trend for women's participation in public affairs that was rooted in local initiative rather than central policy.<sup>45</sup> The *Gazette* was enthusiastic, declaring Mrs Mitchell "universally popular" and only opposed by a few "high and dry" persons who were against women in public affairs, showing older prejudices still lingered on.<sup>46</sup> Yet, the Board seems to have welcomed Mrs Mitchell as she was elected to workhouse committee on taking up her new appointment and her proposals for training of a male cook for the workhouse were readily accepted.<sup>47</sup> A second female guardian Mrs Raynbird was elected in 1897 and although the evidence is slender, the evidence from the Basingstoke Minutes on the role of female guardians seems to concur with Steven King's positive assessment of the Bolton female guardians.<sup>48</sup> During the 1890s central legislation and local initiatives made the Board more democratic in its membership and its operations.

It can be seen that the Basingstoke Board of guardians was a relatively stable organisation with considerable continuity of membership across the late century. Until the mid-1890s, many guardians were long-serving and belonged to a closely-connected group of local elites. The attitudes of many guardians towards poverty as a moral weakness persisted into the 1890s, although attitudes of officials at the national level were changing during the late-century. In addition, the desire to keep the rates as low as possible is evident, although reforms were made in the operation of poor relief. Moreover, the Board experienced significant changes as legislation expanded the role and composition of the Board of

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<sup>45</sup> Simon Fowler, *The Workhouse: The People, the Places, the Life Behind Doors* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword History, 2014), p. 17.

<sup>46</sup> *Gazette*, Saturday 11 April 1896, p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 15 October 1897 (PL3/5/23).

<sup>48</sup> Steven King, "'We Might Be Trusted': Female Poor Law Guardians and the Development of the New Poor Law: The Case of Bolton, England, 1880-1906, *International Review of Social History*, 49 (2004) 27-46.

guardians during the second half of the nineteenth century. Ultimately, the role of the Board of guardians remained the administration of the Poor Law in the Basingstoke Union.

### Chapter 3: The Response of the Guardians to the ‘Crusade against Outdoor Relief’

The ‘crusade against outdoor relief’ was a policy initiated by Poor Law officials at the national level that sought to persuade local poor law unions to reduce the numbers of paupers receiving outdoor relief and hence the cost of poor relief in the late nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will briefly look at the system for outdoor relief in the Basingstoke Union, before moving to examine how the Basingstoke Board of Guardians responded to the ‘crusade’ policy. Consideration will be given to the impact of implementation of this policy and some of the consequences of the ‘crusade’ for applicants for poor relief. It will consider whether relief practice matched the rules laid down by the guardians and how the ‘crusade’ was challenged in the form of medical relief to outdoor paupers. It will be shown that the adoption of the ‘crusade against outdoor relief’ in the Basingstoke Union had significant impacts upon the local poor, but in practice the guardians did not always adhere to their own rules in the granting of outdoor relief.

The Basingstoke Union was located in North Hampshire with a market town at the centre of an agricultural area.<sup>2</sup> Following the Union Chargeability Act of 1865, the poor rates were distributed centrally for the whole union by the Board of Guardians either to pay for the union workhouse and its inmates, or as outdoor relief to people living in their own homes across the Basingstoke area. The union was divided into three relief districts and the poor seeking assistance applied to the Relieving Officer in their district, either for relief with living

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<sup>1</sup> David Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain, 1870-1914* (London: Pearson, 1998; Routledge, 2013), pp. 21-2.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Stokes, *The Making of Basingstoke: From Prehistory to the Present Day*, ed. by Bob and Barbara Applin (Basingstoke Archaeological & Historical Society, 2008), p. 108.

expenses, or for medical assistance for those who were injured, or sick. Relief was paid in small amounts of money, a few shillings per week, and in kind generally as loaves of bread, or as medicines.<sup>3</sup> Outdoor paupers were the ‘deserving poor’ unable to support themselves through no fault of their own, including the elderly, children, the sick, or infirm, and widows, or deserted wives and their children. The New Poor Law system had originally been established to end relief in the community, particularly for able-bodied male paupers by means of the workhouse test, but despite the intentions of the 1834 legislation outdoor relief remained an important part of the poor law.<sup>4</sup> In 1870, Charlotte Cooper, an elderly pauper, was paid 2 shillings per week, although this was later increased to 2s, 6d.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, George Rabbit, living in Ramsdell in 1884, received 1s 6d and 2 loaves per week.<sup>6</sup> The sums paid in outdoor relief were meagre compared to the average wage of 12s per week for an agricultural labourer in this area, but unlike philanthropy poor relief was paid regularly and often over long periods of time as in the case of Charlotte Cooper whose relief was increased three years after she was first granted relief.<sup>7</sup> Thus, outdoor relief was an important resource for many of the poorest members of the local community.

In June 1870, Wyndham Portal, an active member of the Basingstoke Board of Guardians with an interest in welfare reform, organised a “Conference on the administration of the Poor Laws” in Basingstoke which was attended by delegates from across the south of England.<sup>8</sup>

This was the first conference of its kind and local newspapers covered the event in great

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<sup>3</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 185.

<sup>4</sup> Englander, p.15.

<sup>5</sup> Hampshire Record Office (HRO): Guardian Minutes book, 18 February 1870 (PL3/5/13); Minutes book 4 April 1873 (PL3/5/14).

<sup>6</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 20 June 1884 (P13/5/17).

<sup>7</sup> Parliamentary Papers (PP): *The Royal Commission on Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, 2<sup>nd</sup> Report* (1868) 4202, 4202-1, Appendix H, pp. 44-5.

<sup>8</sup> *Hampshire Chronicle*, Saturday 30 July 1870, pp. 9-10.

detail. In his chairman's address, William Beach MP (another Basingstoke guardian) stated that the present poor law system was an improvement upon the old system before 1834, but recently the system had "relapsed" with an alarming increase in outdoor relief as the labouring man felt "justified in applying for assistance" at any minor occasion.<sup>9</sup> Whilst conceding that outdoor relief should be given in cases of accidents, Beach reminded the delegates that guardians should exercise great discretion and only grant relief if the man was truly destitute. Later Major Marx of the Alresford Union read a paper on outdoor relief, calling pauperism "a disease of man's creation" and criticizing the inefficiency of the poor law during the Lancashire Cotton Famine and the recent winter crisis in London.<sup>10</sup> Marx supported greater use of the workhouse test, in addition to forcing family and friends to support the destitute before recourse to relief. A supporting speaker Mr Yonge reminded delegates that the Minute of 20 November 1869 stated relief was for those who were destitute and not to subsidize low wages.<sup>11</sup> In response, Portal agreed that applicants for poor relief were increasing, indeed nationally the numbers were "gigantic", but he felt it was "not kind, liberal or Christian" to refuse relief to elderly people living with their children.<sup>12</sup> Another Basingstoke guardian Robert Davis also had reservations about sending elderly labourers to the workhouse, because they had been unable to save for their old age on very low wages. The reports of the conference show that the Basingstoke guardians were familiar with national policy and concerned about increases in outdoor relief. Although they deplored frequent applications for relief, the Basingstoke guardians endorsed retrenchment, but not the abolition of outdoor relief.

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<sup>9</sup> *Hampshire Chronicle*, Saturday 30 July 1870, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Reading Mercury*, Saturday 6 August 1870, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> PP: *Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Board, 1869-70*; (1870) [C.123], Appendix A, No. 4, pp. 9-11. The Minute of 20 November 1869 was issued by George Goschen President of the Poor Law Board and called for restrictions on outdoor relief and greater cooperation between guardians and charities.

<sup>12</sup> *Reading Mercury*, Saturday 6 August 1870, p.2.

The concerns about relief expressed at the conference in Basingstoke were accompanied by steps towards greater restriction of outdoor relief by the Basingstoke Board of Guardians as evidenced in the Minutes books. In March 1870 the guardians resolved to review all cases of outdoor relief, whilst the relieving officers were asked to investigate the cases of paupers who might be ratepayers, or homeowners, and therefore not destitute.<sup>13</sup> The following year the Board agreed that all urgent applications for relief should be granted as a loan only, thus tightening procedures for granting of relief.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the Local Government Board (LGB) launched the ‘crusade against outdoor relief’ with a circular to its Poor Law Inspectors that attributed the large increase in outdoor relief to “defective management or administration of the law” by guardians who were too ready to grant relief.<sup>15</sup> Inspectors were urged to persuade guardians to reduce the amount of outdoor relief by applying the workhouse test to all able-bodied adults and severely restricting relief to other groups of paupers such as deserted wives and widows.<sup>16</sup> In March 1872, the Basingstoke Board of Guardians received a visit from the Poor Law Inspector, Mr W H T Hawley with the result that the guardians agreed to establish a committee to consider the administration of outdoor relief.<sup>17</sup> In June, this committee submitted new “general rules” to the full Board who resolved to embrace the principles of the national ‘crusade’ by accepting rules that would deny relief in future to many people who would previously have been granted assistance.<sup>18</sup> The new rules reproduced the restrictions on relief to widows and deserted wives outlined in the LGB circular, plus support of paupers by family members, indicating the influence of government

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<sup>13</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 18 March 1870 (PL3/5/13).

<sup>14</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 3 March 1871 (PL3/5/13).

<sup>15</sup> PP: *First Annual Report of the Local Government Board, 1871-2, (1872)* [C.516] Appendix A, No. 20, p. 64.

<sup>16</sup> PP: *First Annual Report, 1872, Appendix A, No. 20, p. 67.*

<sup>17</sup>HRO: Minutes book, 19 April 1872 (PL3/5/13).

<sup>18</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 12 July 1872 (PL3/5/13).

guidance upon the guardians. In addition, relief would be denied to those deemed to belong the union, but living outside its boundaries and in addition refused to people of “bad character”, deemed to be profligate, or living in “unhealthy” homes.<sup>19</sup> Eligibility for outdoor relief was to be severely restricted, but not abolished as the guardians reserved the right to grant relief in exceptional cases. This supports the notion that the guardians were motivated by the desire to reduce relief costs rather than a belief in the benefits of the workhouse outlined in an influential report by the Poor Law Inspector Henry Longley.<sup>20</sup> However, the Basingstoke rules represented a significant departure from earlier practice, since Sarah Trimby had been granted an additional shilling per week although she was living in the New Forest in 1871 and Caroline Lester and two children were granted 2s 6d per week whilst living in Henley.<sup>21</sup> The decision of the Basingstoke guardians to adopt the ‘crusade against outdoor relief’ brought them into line with national policy while imposing a new, stricter regime for the local poor.

The Board of Guardians implemented the ‘crusade’ from the summer of 1872 and local recording of numbers of outdoor paupers in the Minutes books enables the implementation of this policy to be traced for nearly a decade. Between 1873 and 1881, the number of outdoor paupers was recorded at each board meeting with half-year statements of accounts on Lady Day (early April) and Michaelmas (late October). By sampling the figures for the weeks of Lady Day and Michaelmas in each year the impact of the ‘crusade’ on numbers of paupers can be traced, see Figure 1, although these represent head counts on particular dates and cannot account for repeat claims within a single year.

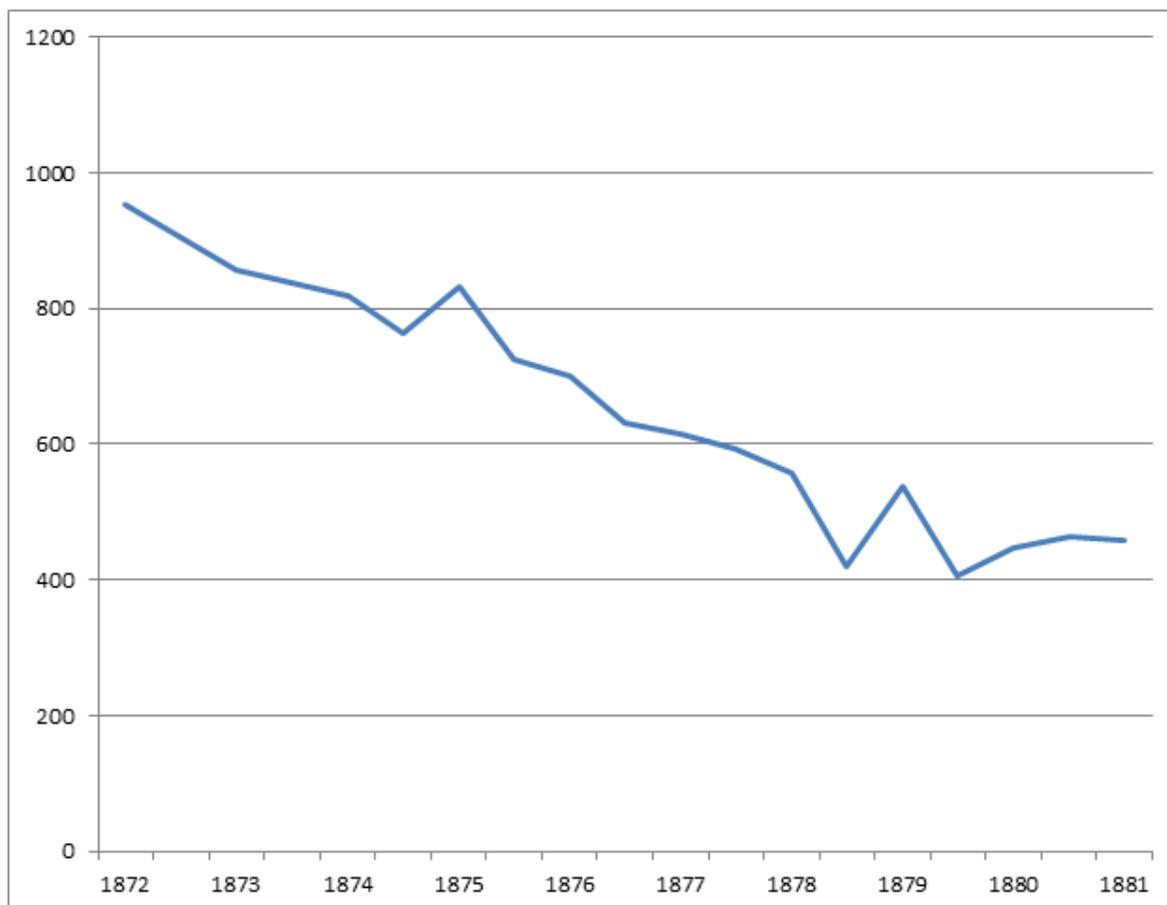
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<sup>19</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 12 July 1872 (PL3/5/13).

<sup>20</sup> Karel Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 96-100.

<sup>21</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 15 September 1871 (PL3/5/13).

Figure 1. The number of persons in receipt of outdoor relief in the Basingstoke Union, 1872-1881



Sources: HRO: Guardian Minutes books 1872 –1881 (PL3/5/13-16)

A downward trend in the numbers of outdoor paupers was interrupted twice, firstly during the winter 1874-5 apparently by a relaxation of retrenchment by the Board, because Portal threatened a new motion on reducing relief.<sup>22</sup> However, the winter of 1878-9 coincided with bad weather and a national recession leading to a national increase in outdoor relief.<sup>23</sup> The number of outdoor paupers fell by approximately 46 per cent across the union. This is a steeper reduction than the 33 per cent fall in the numbers receiving outdoor relief between 1871 and 1876 across England and Wales, suggesting the guardians implemented a fairly strict ‘crusade’ in the Basingstoke area.<sup>24</sup> Some historians have linked the ‘crusade’ with

<sup>22</sup> HRO: Minutes books, 25 September 1874 (PL3/5/14)

<sup>23</sup>Englander, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> Lees, p. 262.

London and urban centres, indeed the Southampton Board of guardians reduced the numbers receiving outdoor relief by more than 50 per cent during the 1870s.<sup>25</sup> However, there were a few rural unions who also implemented strict ‘crusades’, including the Brixworth Union in Northamptonshire that sought to abolish outdoor relief altogether.<sup>26</sup> In both Brixworth and Southampton, the leading promoters of retrenchment were members of Charity Organization Society (C.O.S) with an ideological mission to end pauperism and engender self-reliance in the working population.<sup>27</sup> However, the Basingstoke guardians do not appear to have supported C.O.S, indeed an attempt to establish the society in the town in the early 1880s failed through lack of support.<sup>28</sup> Rather, local economic concerns, as depression hit agriculture during the 1870s, were important to the Basingstoke Board of Guardians who were dominated by landowners and farmers at this time.<sup>29</sup>

The ‘crusade against outdoor relief’ continued to be promoted by national officials until the mid-1890s and the Basingstoke guardians also remained committed to this policy throughout this period. The rules on outdoor relief were reaffirmed by the guardians in 1877 and 1889.<sup>30</sup> The recording of numbers of outdoor paupers in the Minutes books ceased in 1881, but half-yearly expenditure totals continued until 1890 making it possible to trace how much the guardians were spending on outdoor relief, see Figure 2.

Figure 2. Expenditure on outdoor relief in the Basingstoke Union, 1874 – 1890

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<sup>25</sup> Lees, p. 265; Ruth Hutchinson Crocker, ‘The Victorian Poor Law in Crisis and Change: Southampton 1870-1895’, *Albion*, 19 (1987), 19-44 (p. 26).

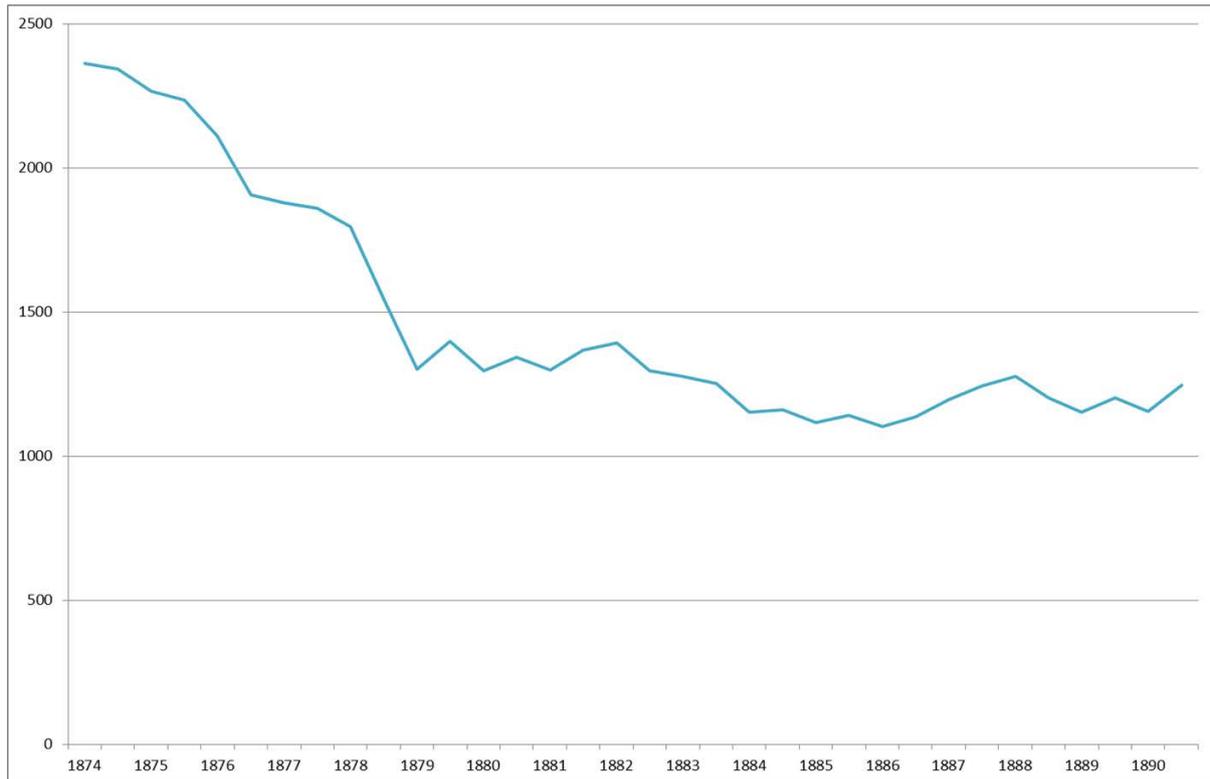
<sup>26</sup>Elizabeth Hurren, ‘Welfare-to-Work Schemes and a Crusade Against Outdoor Relief in the Brixworth Union, Northamptonshire, in the 1880s’, *Family & Community History*, 4 (2001), pp. 19-30. (p.19).

<sup>27</sup> Hurren, ‘Welfare-to-Work Schemes and a Crusade Against Outdoor Relief’, p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> *Reading Mercury*, Saturday 3 December 1884, p5.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Turner, ‘Agriculture, 1860-1914’ in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain: Volume 2 Economic Maturity, 1860-1939*, ed. by Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 133-159 (p. 144).

<sup>30</sup>HRO: Minutes books, 18 May 1877 (PL3/5/15); 7 June 1889 (PL3/5/19).



Sources: HRO: Guardian Minutes books 1870 – 1890 (PL3/5/13-19).

Expenditure was significantly reduced during the 1870s, thereafter expenditure fluctuated between £1,300 to £1,100 for each half-year period throughout the 1880s suggesting the number of people receiving outdoor relief stopped falling and stabilized. While it is possible that number of outdoor paupers was further reduced, because the guardians granted larger amounts of relief to individuals the evidence from the Minutes books contradicts this notion with amounts of relief largely unchanged across the late-century. In contrast, Southampton's expenditure on outdoor relief reached its lowest point in the early 1880s, before increasing again as the sums granted to individuals increased over time.<sup>31</sup> The fall in expenditure on outdoor relief in the Basingstoke Union serves to underline the importance of the cost of relief to the guardians, yet they remained committed to assisting the poorest in the community.

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<sup>31</sup> Crocker, Figure 2, p. 26-7.

The impact of the Basingstoke Board's 'crusade' upon the local poor was considerable, because obtaining outdoor relief became more difficult as applicants now had to satisfy moral as well as economic criteria implied by the relief rules. A local historian has also attributed the reduction in outdoor relief to fewer claimants as the town of Basingstoke expanded and provided more work.<sup>32</sup> However, greater availability of work would benefit the able-bodied men and women who were largely excluded from outdoor relief before the 'crusade' began and fails to account for the population in the rural areas of the union.<sup>33</sup> Many historians have noted that women, previously able to obtain relief such as widows or deserted wives, were targets for restrictions as a consequence of the 'crusade' and this is supported by evidence in the Basingstoke Minutes.<sup>34</sup> These Minutes are the best source for details of individual paupers, because the Board rarely took legal proceedings (time and cost were probably factors against legal action) that would provide additional evidence. Caroline Lester, living with two daughters, had her relief stopped in 1873, because she was living outside the union.<sup>35</sup> The following year, her daughters Hannah and Alice were admitted to the Basingstoke workhouse after having been abandoned by their mother, demonstrating the difficulties faced by women with children.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Jane Keep had her relief withdrawn and was offered the workhouse when her living circumstances failed to satisfy the guardians. Keep was living in St Pancras, London with two children, but was granted non-resident relief in March 1875 after an appeal from the clerk to the St Pancras guardians and a Mr Crispin, but in November 1875 relief was withdrawn following information received by the St

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<sup>32</sup> Barbara A Large, *Basingstoke Workhouse and Poor Law Union* (Stroud: History Press, 2016), p. 145.

<sup>33</sup> 'Basingstoke and Deane', *Vision of Britain* <<http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk>> [accessed 26 October 2018].

<sup>34</sup> Pat Thane, 'Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England', *History Workshop*, 6 (1978) 29-51 (p.39); Englander, p. 19; Lees, p. 267-8.

<sup>35</sup>HRO: Minutes book, 31 January 1873 (PL3/5/14).

<sup>36</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 5 June 1874 (PL3/5/14).

Pancras clerk.<sup>37</sup> In addition, the aged and sick also found it more difficult to access relief, even when sanctioned by another union as in the case of William Stacey granted relief by the Hartley Wintney Union, but rejected by the Basingstoke guardians, because the circumstances were not sufficiently exceptional.<sup>38</sup> A further consequence of the ‘crusade’ was the active pursuit by the Board of relatives to provide financial support to relief applicants. In 1877, Jesse Elliot, a labourer in Sherfield-on-Loddon, attended a board meeting to explain why he could not support his mother Charlotte.<sup>39</sup> Elliot’s explanation was rejected by the Board who withdrew relief and threatened proceedings against the son if the mother should be admitted to the workhouse, so the son agreed to pay 2s per week in parental support.<sup>40</sup> The consequences for the poor of the Basingstoke ‘crusade’ included both greater restrictions upon the availability of relief and the active pursuit of relatives to provide financial support to family members.

The rules for outdoor relief were maintained by the Board until the 1890s, but in practice the guardians did not always adhere to their own rules. They had no desire to increase spending by forcing greater numbers of people into the workhouse, indeed the Minutes books show that the numbers of indoor paupers remained roughly 150-170 people throughout the 1870s.<sup>41</sup> In 1876, at the height of the national ‘crusade’ the Poor Law Inspector Baldwin Fleming produced a report for the LGB critical of the implementation of retrenchment measures in Basingstoke.<sup>42</sup> He stated that arrangements were made for relatives to contribute to

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<sup>37</sup>HRO: Minutes books, 12 February 1875; 12 March 1875; 19 March 1875; 20 November 1875 (PL3/5/14).

<sup>38</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 9 January 1880 (PL3/5/16).

<sup>39</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 13 July 1877 (PL3/5/15).

<sup>40</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 22 July 1877 (PL3/5/15).

<sup>41</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 1873-80 (PL3/5/13-16).

<sup>42</sup>The National Archives (TNA): Correspondence for Basingstoke Poor Law Union 390, 15 December 1876 (MH 12/10685).

supporting relief claimants, but rarely enforced and little relief was granted as loans. Pauper statements on financial circumstances were accepted without independent inquiries and unannounced visits to the homes of claimants were rarely made by officials. The guardians maintained that additional inquiries were not necessary as officials and guardians knew their parishes and inhabitants well, so indicating a different culture to metropolitan unions where applicants were not known to officials. Furthermore “the reduction of pauperism must be obtained gradually”, so as not to inflict hardship and pauperism was then at a lower level compared to earlier years.<sup>43</sup> Certainly, the strict enforcement of denying relief to those outside the union lapsed during the early 1880s as chairmanship of the Board passed from Portal to Chaloner Chute who was more pragmatic about reform. Elizabeth Cowdrey, living in Hartley Wintney, was granted non-resident relief of 2s and 8 loaves per week for herself and family in 1884.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Hannah Budd, living in Winchester, had her relief increased to 3s 6d after officials confirmed that her son Charles Kidgell could not afford to support her.<sup>45</sup> Also, Thomas Hughes, living in Kingsclere, received 1s 6d and 2 loaves per week in 1886.<sup>46</sup> Pauper cases recorded in the Minutes tend to be the difficult cases that required a Board decision, therefore it is difficult to establish if other relief rules were also dropped during periods of economic hardship. Baldwyn Fleming’s statement on pauperism for the south-east of England lists the number of outdoor paupers in the Basingstoke Union at 510 people on Lady Day 1891 and this represents a modest increase on numbers in 1881, see Figure 1.<sup>47</sup> The statement shows that the population for whole union had grown by approximately 1,300 people since 1881, so it is reasonable to conclude that obtaining outdoor relief had not become much easier for the local poor. However, outdoor relief was still

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<sup>43</sup> TNA: Correspondence, 15 December 1876 (MH 12/10685).

<sup>44</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 9 May 1884 (PL3/5/17).

<sup>45</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 6 December 1885 (PL3/5/18).

<sup>46</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 17 December 1886 (PL3/5/18).

<sup>47</sup> HRO: Local Government Board Inspector’s statement on pauperism and expenditure, 1891-2. (38M49/C3/13)

available and the introduction of all-elected boards from 1895 did not provoke a political reaction to remove ‘crusading’ guardians as occurred in the Brixworth Union.<sup>48</sup> The Basingstoke Board did not impose restrictions as strictly as their rules suggest, but the ‘crusade’ policy was maintained well into the 1890s.

The Basingstoke guardians maintained their ‘crusade’ on relief in the community, but the general acceptance of restrictions on relief did not extend to medical relief for paupers. The union was served by seven doctors, each covering their own medical district, and the Minutes books provided the key surviving source of evidence for their activities. During the 1870s, the finance committee, chaired by Wyndham Portal, sought to impose restrictions and introduce loans for medical relief. Resolutions requiring the poor, following a visit to the doctor, to obtain authorization from the relieving officer before obtaining their medicines were passed in 1872, 1875 and 1877 suggesting that the poor, even officials, resisted attempts to alter customary practice for medical orders.<sup>49</sup> In addition, a critical report from the Poor Law Inspector on outdoor relief noted that loans for medical relief were rarely recovered, further evidence of a reluctance to accept new measures for medical relief in the Basingstoke union.<sup>50</sup> Occasionally, district doctors were critical of the union’s restrictions on relief to the consternation of the guardians. In March 1889, the Board queried why George Lovell, a sick pauper, appeared not to have been visited by the district doctor for nearly five months, but received mutton each week on doctor’s orders.<sup>51</sup> The doctor replied that Lovell had been receiving relief for a number of years and “like many others” required “feeding, not visiting”,

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<sup>48</sup> Hurren, ‘Welfare-to-Work Schemes and the Crusade Against Outdoor Relief’, p. 19.

<sup>49</sup> HRO: Minutes books, 14 June 1872 (PL3/5/13); 12 February 1875 (PL3/5/14); 9 March 1877 (PL3/5/15).

<sup>50</sup> TNA: Correspondence, 15 December 1876 (MH 12/10685).

<sup>51</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 29 March 1889 (PL3/5/19).

a criticism of meagre amounts of relief.<sup>52</sup> The Minutes show that the guardians were unhappy at this reply, but were more concerned that the doctor was not following procedures than about Lovell's treatment with additional food. It later transpired that the doctor had visited Lovell regularly, but failed to update his record book. However, in 1891 the Board refused to pay surgery fees for the victim of an accident, John Appleton, at the local cottage hospital, because he was not a "bonafide pauper".<sup>53</sup> Several district doctors attended a board meeting and criticized this "illiberal" decision, threatening not attend accident cases in future. The Board compromised by agreeing to pay an annual subscription to the cottage hospital for the treatment of paupers rather than risk further confrontation with their doctors.<sup>54</sup> The encounters between the Board and the doctors expose their conflicting interests with the medical practitioners concerned with patients and fees, whereas the guardians focused upon the costs and procedures. The Basingstoke 'crusade' failed to restrict the expansion of medical relief, partly due to entrenched medical practices, but also through opposition from members of the medical profession.

It can be seen that the Basingstoke Board of Guardians adopted the 'crusade against outdoor relief' in the early 1870s and maintained their rules on relief until the 1890s. The Board appear to have been motivated largely by economic considerations rather ideological objections to outdoor relief and they were prepared to allow some exceptions to the relief rules. The imposition of 'crusade' had a considerable impact upon the local poor and the numbers receiving outdoor relief fell significantly during the 1870s never to return to levels in earlier decades. Yet, some evidence suggests that the implementation of retrenchment may

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<sup>52</sup>HRO: Minutes book, 11 April 1889 (PL3/5/19).

<sup>53</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 28 August 1891 (PL3/5/20).

<sup>54</sup>HRO: Minutes book, 9 October 1891 (PL3/5/20).

not have been as strict as the rules suggest and the Board failed to restrict medical relief. The Board appear inconsistent in their implementation of the 'crusade' rather than abandoning retrenchment.

#### Chapter 4: The Workhouse and the Implementation of Specialized Care

Historians have identified the introduction of “specialized ‘treatment’” as an important development of the late nineteenth century Poor Law, with new strategies the care of ‘deserving’ paupers promoted by central government.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will look briefly at the role of the workhouse. It will then consider to what extent the Basingstoke Board of Guardians implemented new strategies for more specialized treatment of selected categories of workhouse inmates, namely children, the aged and sick within the workhouse. These categories of inmates often overlapped and their care prompted a good deal of debate amongst the guardians, although there were other groups of inmates and concerns with the workhouse. It will be shown that the Board were willing to implement national policies for specialized care, but reluctant to commit to large-scale expenditure.

The Basingstoke Union workhouse was built in 1836 on the edge of the village of Old Basing to the east of the town of Basingstoke. The Guardians initially agreed to build a workhouse for 400 inmates, but adopted a design for 300 and when constructed the building was only considered suitable for 230 inmates.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the workhouse was to reduce pauperism, or the number of people in receipt of poor relief, with a system of indoor relief for male able-bodied paupers and their families under the New Poor Law. In accordance with national policy, the workhouse embodied in its design and operation the principle of ‘less

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 275-281; David Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain, 1834-1914* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 24-26; Alan Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), pp. 55-58 and Bernard Harris, *The Origins of the British Welfare State: Social Welfare in England and Wales, 1800-1945* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 56-57.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara A. Large, *Basingstoke Workhouse and Poor Law Union* (Stroud: History Press, 2016) p.28.

eligibility' that the conditions for the indoor pauper should be worse than for the lowest-paid labourer outside the workhouse and this was achieved by loss of liberty with a regime of strict discipline and labour.<sup>3</sup> A printed copy of the workhouse rules, dated 1842, survives in a scrapbook compiled by the master of the workhouse in the 1890s, and shows that the inmates were segregated into 7 classes according to gender and age with separate living accommodation for each group.<sup>4</sup> These rules remained in force for the remainder of the century. A Poor Law Inspector's report in 1886 described the workhouse as "generally remarkably clean and well-kept", suggesting that implementation was reasonably strict.<sup>5</sup> Although the 1834 legislation focused upon male able-bodied paupers, in practice the 'deserving poor' including children, the elderly and the sick were also admitted to the workhouse and were subject to the same regime created for the able-bodied paupers. A study of the mid-century workhouse populations of Winchester and Basingstoke concluded that children and the aged formed the majority of inmates, with a minority of able-bodied adult inmates.<sup>6</sup> The study relied upon census data for the Basingstoke workhouse in the absence of any other records and using later census returns provides a glimpse of the inmate population during the late-century, see Table 1.

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<sup>3</sup> Englander, pp. 11-12.

<sup>4</sup> Hampshire Record Office (HRO): Volume with various loose documents of Thomas Arter (154A07/2).

<sup>5</sup> HRO: Guardians Minutes book, 26 March 1886 (PL3/5/18).

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Hinde and Fiona Turnbull, 'The Population of Two Hampshire Workhouses, 1851-1861', *Local Population Studies*, 61 (1998) 38-53, p. 51.

Table 1. The number of workhouse inmates in selected age groups with percentages, 1871-1891

Age group of inmates	1871 numbers & percentages	1881 numbers & percentages	1891 numbers & percentages
Children 0-14 years	69 39%	66 36%	51 28%
Able-bodied adults 15-59 years	65 37%	43 23%	49 27%
Aged 60 and over	43 24%	75 41%	82 45%
Totals	177 100%	184 100%	182 100%

Sources: Basingstoke Workhouse Census 1871, 1881, 1891<<http://basingstokeworkhouse.info>> [accessed 21 October 2018].

The decline in the numbers of able-bodied adults and children was probably the result of improving “real incomes” and fewer working people needing poor relief.<sup>7</sup> However, the numbers of the elderly inmates nearly doubled during this period and this increase in numbers coincided with the ‘crusade against outdoor relief’, so it is possible that restrictions on the availability of outdoor relief to the elderly and infirm forced many old people into the workhouse. Yet, it should be noted that indoor paupers formed a minority in receipt of poor relief in Basingstoke, with approximately 27 per cent of paupers in the workhouse on Lady

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<sup>7</sup> Lees, p. 295.

Day 1891 and this corresponds with a national figures of 73 per cent of paupers on outdoor relief at the end of the century.<sup>8</sup>

The welfare and education of workhouse children was a source of concern for the reformers during the late-century. Education for workhouse children “as a remedy for pauperism” had been part of official policy since the 1840s, however from the 1870s the Board of Guardians had a legal duty to educate pauper children in their care.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the Local Government Board (LGB) approved new forms of accommodation for children outside the workhouse with “cottage homes”, or boarding-out schemes where children could attend local board schools.<sup>10</sup> Wyndham Portal was Vice-Chairman of the Basingstoke Board when he presented a paper on the education of pauper children to the first southeast Poor Law Conference.<sup>11</sup> He argued for local discretion, as opposed to district schools (taking children from several unions), in educating workhouse children using officials and teachers who really cared about their charges. The Board of Guardians seemed to have agreed with Portal’s views, because they maintained the workhouse school until the retirement of a much-respected schoolmistress Matilda Smith in 1897.<sup>12</sup> Confidence in the school was reinforced by complimentary annual reports from Wyndham Holgate the Workhouse Schools Inspector who considered the children “well taught” having passed a “fair examination” after such a short period in the workhouse.<sup>13</sup> However, the Board was slow to consider alternative accommodation for the workhouse children compared to urban centres such as Birmingham

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<sup>8</sup> HRO: *Local Government Board Inspector’s Statement on Pauperism and Expenditure, 1891-2* (38M49/C3/13); Kidd, p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> Lees, p.275.

<sup>10</sup> Angela Negrine, ‘The Treatment of Sick Children in the Workhouse by the Leicester Poor Law Union, 1867-1914’, *Family & Community History*, 13 (2010) 34-44 (pp. 37-8).

<sup>11</sup> *Hampshire Chronicle*, Saturday 10 July 1870, p9.

<sup>12</sup> *Hampshire and Berkshire Gazette*, Saturday 22 May 1897, p.7.

<sup>13</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 17 October 1879 (PL3/5/16).

which built cottage homes for children in 1879.<sup>14</sup> Plans to consider the boarding-out of children in Basingstoke were abandoned in 1879 when Reverend Alder, the promoter of the proposal, failed to attend board meetings.<sup>15</sup> The LGB recommended boarding-out for orphaned and abandoned children who were long-term residents in workhouses, but in a rural workhouses like Basingstoke many children stayed for short periods of time as evidenced by inspector's comments. This may help to explain the reluctance of the Board to take any action, plus Basingstoke town did not have a board school for boarded-out children to attend until 1888.<sup>16</sup> In 1889, each guardian was provided with a copy of the LGB's order on the boarding-out of children suggesting the matter was under serious consideration, but the Board soon became preoccupied with the problems over the care of the sick and aged inmates.<sup>17</sup> By 1895, the Board had agreed in principle to boarding-out, but some guardians seem to have been reluctant to relinquish control with Reverend White doubtful of finding suitable foster parents in local villages and proposing the children remain in the workhouse, but attend the local board school.<sup>18</sup> The children were transferred to the local board school immediately after the retirement of the schoolmistress and boarding-out was introduced by the end of the century. Local circumstances with problems in the workhouse and a long-serving, respected teacher, all contributed to delays in the implementation of the boarding-out policy by the Board.

The Board of Guardians were slow to adopt the boarding-out scheme, but they were prepared to allow some special treatment for children and took pains to secure residential care for

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<sup>14</sup> Alistair Ritch, 'English Poor Law Institutional Care for Older People: Identifying the 'Aged and Infirm' and the 'Sick' in Birmingham Workhouse, 1852-1912', *Social History of Medicine*, 27 (2013) 64-85 (p.74)

<sup>15</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 12 December 1879 (PL3 /5/16).

<sup>16</sup> *Reading Mercury*, Saturday 18 February 1888, p.5.

<sup>17</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 7 June 1889 (PL3/5/19); Parliamentary Papers (PP): *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Local Government Board, 1889-90*; 1890 [C.6141], Appendix A, No. 22, p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> *Hampshire and Berkshire Gazette*, Saturday 23 November 1895, p.3.

children with disabilities. From the 1870s, the Board sent physically, or mentally, disabled children to specialist residential schools often run by charities. In 1873, Dr Webb the workhouse medical officer requested that William Gains, an “idiot child” be placed in a specialist school.<sup>19</sup> Enquiries were made of the county asylum near Fareham in south Hampshire, but they had no school for children and recommended a private school at Reigate, Surrey.<sup>20</sup> The school refused to take a pauper child and Gains remained in the workhouse before being sent to the county asylum a few years later. However, in 1885 the Board refused a request to take back Gains, because he was an “objectionable character” and the workhouse could not provide proper care for him.<sup>21</sup> The Hampshire county asylum was state-run, but outside the Poor Law, with fees payable for private and pauper patients. Fees for specialist institutions could be substantial and payable for many years. Yet, the Board agreed to pay nearly ten pounds per year for Ann Tubb to attend the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Blind School in 1883 with a further increase to twelve pounds in 1887.<sup>22</sup> This treatment of disabled children is comparable with other unions such as Leicester which sent disabled children to specialist schools in addition to building its own children’s home and infirmary.<sup>23</sup> The specialized treatment is an indication of a growing awareness in society that children should be treated differently to adults.<sup>24</sup> Some special treatment was provided to workhouse children, because in addition to Christmas festivities in the workhouse guardians arranged for summertime treats for the children at the homes of local philanthropists in the 1870s.<sup>25</sup> The summer treat became a regular event and as rail travel became more affordable the Board agreed to a seaside trip to Bournemouth arranged by one of the female guardians.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 22 August 1873 (PL3/5/14).

<sup>20</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 5 September 1873 (PL3/5/14).

<sup>21</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 13 February 1885 (PL3/5/17).

<sup>22</sup> HRO: Minutes books, 14 September 1883 (PL3/5/17); 23 December 1886 (PL3/5/18).

<sup>23</sup> Negrine, p.39.

<sup>24</sup> Lees, p. 275.

<sup>25</sup> *Reading Mercury*, Saturday 5 July 1874, p.5.

<sup>26</sup> *Gazette*, Saturday 17 July 1897, p.6.

The involvement of the Ladies Visiting Committee and female guardians in children's welfare is very similar to female involvement with the poor law in the Bolton and Lancaster Unions at this time, and shows how middle-class women used their domestic expertise as wives and mothers to further the welfare of workhouse children, with the acquiescence of the male guardians.<sup>27</sup> However, a motion to discontinue the "distinctive garb" of children as it imposed the "stigma of pauperism" was rejected by a large majority of the guardians.<sup>28</sup> Several guardians pointed out that improvements had already been made and the children looked very nice in their outfits, indicating the persistence of a traditional view of pauper children. The Board provided specialized schools for children with disabilities, but more limited improvements for most workhouse children.

Special treatment for the aged paupers also developed as an area of concern in the late nineteenth century as the influence of social reformers such as Charles Booth identified poverty and dependence upon poor relief as a major problem for the elderly.<sup>29</sup> The New Poor Law had no exact definition for old age, but the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor in 1895 accepted sixty and above as signifying this category.<sup>30</sup> The Basingstoke Board of Guardians demonstrated much sympathy for the plight of the aged paupers, but struggled to make improvements in the workhouse due to rapidly increasing numbers of the aged inmates (see Table 1 above). The workhouse was built to house the able-bodied labourer and family, so division of the inmates into different categories requiring separate living space over the years occupied all the available space and by the early 1870s the Board was concerned about

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<sup>27</sup> Steven King, "'We Might be Trusted': Female Poor Law Guardians and the Development of the New Poor Law: The Case of Bolton, 1880-1906", *International Review of Social History*, 49 (2004) 27-46; Neil Quinn, 'Men of Yesterday: Lancaster Poor Law Union, 1870-1911', *Family & Community History*, 18 (2015) 3-23 (p.16).

<sup>28</sup> *Gazette*, Saturday 23 July 1892, p.5.

<sup>29</sup> Lees, p.249.

<sup>30</sup> Ritch, p.66.

overcrowded accommodation. In 1871, aged inmates complained to visiting guardians about the cold and cramped living conditions with “43 old men trying to sit around one fire”.<sup>31</sup> These complaints were made in January when the inmate population was likely to be at its highest level, however the guardians were shocked at the conditions and established a committee to oversee enlarging the available accommodation. Two years later they asked the Master to investigate if aged, married couples could be housed together in accordance with national recommendations, but he reported that there insufficient space within the workhouse.<sup>32</sup> However, the Board persevered with the scheme and in 1875 a former school room was converted into accommodation for two couples.<sup>33</sup> The surviving records reveal few details about the elderly inmates of the workhouse, but Rachel Wilder, an old woman in the sick ward, attracted the interest of the Poor Law Inspector. She told the Inspector that “I would rather hang myself than remain in the union”, but the infirmary nurse maintained that Wilder was not serious, but just anxious for her freedom and to be reunited with her five, beloved cats.<sup>34</sup> Investigation showed that Wilder remained in the workhouse, because she needed care being of “weak mind” and no longer able to look after herself.<sup>35</sup> Wilder received sympathetic care, because she belonged to the ‘deserving poor’ being both old and sick. In contrast, the short-tempered John Castle was prosecuted for attacking the master with a spade after being set to shift gravel in the stone-breaking yard as a punishment, although he was 71 years old.<sup>36</sup> This case serves a reminder that the workhouse operated on a ‘deterrence principle’ with all the fit and healthy expected to work and abide by the rules, even if

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<sup>31</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 13 January 1871 (PL3/5/13).

<sup>32</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 10 April 1874 (PL3/5/14).

<sup>33</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 30 April 1875 (PL3/5/14).

<sup>34</sup> TNA: Correspondence, 19 October 1876 (MH 12/10684).

<sup>35</sup> TNA: Correspondence, 13 November 1876 (MH 12/10684)

<sup>36</sup> *Gazette*, Saturday 4 July 1896, p3.

advanced in years. The treatment of the aged in the workhouse depended not only on their age, but also their status as married, or unmarried, and importantly on their state of health.

In the 1880s, the Board of Guardians were warned of the increasing number of inmates who were old, sick and bedridden. The Board agreed to employ a paid assistant nurse at £20 per year to work with the only qualified nurse in the workhouse, who was paid £30 per year with additional help from pauper nurses.<sup>37</sup> A few years later, figures for the number of beds in the workhouse and levels of occupancy were submitted to central government, see Table 2.

Table 2: Number of beds for inmates and occupancy levels in the Basingstoke workhouse, 7 March 1883

Men	No. of beds	Occupancy	Women	No. of beds	Occupancy
Able-bodied	16	7	Able-bodied	14	7

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<sup>37</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 2 April 1880 (PL3/5/16).

Over 60	40	37	Over 60	12	5
Boys 2-15	42	33	Girls 2-15	38	31
Infants	6	4	Infants	6	5
Infirmary	36	36	Infirmary	32	30
Infectious hospital	8	0	Infectious hospital	8	0
Receiving ward	3	0	Receiving ward	3	0
Total	151	117	Total	116	78

Source: The National Archives: Correspondence for Basingstoke Poor Law Union 390, 7 March 1883 (MH 12/10689)

These figures show occupancy on one night, but another list of figures in 1887 reveals similar numbers.<sup>38</sup> Later records indicate that many of the infirmery beds were occupied by the aged, raising the possibility of approximately seventy aged men and half that number of old women in the workhouse during the winter months.<sup>39</sup> Historians explain the difference in numbers of old men and women as the result of a gender division of labour that trained women in domestic duties and so more useful and likely to stay with families.<sup>40</sup> Also, in the Basingstoke area women often had greater access to charity assistance with the local almshouses providing more places for women than men.<sup>41</sup> The Board of Guardians made specific improvements for the aged in the workhouse with an amended diet as well as snuff and tobacco, while the workhouse kitchens were updated at the same time.<sup>42</sup> These improvements were no doubt welcome to the aged inmates, but failed to address the

<sup>38</sup> TNA: Correspondence, 25 February 1887 (MH 12/10691).

<sup>39</sup> HRO: 20 April 1897 (PL3/5/22).

<sup>40</sup> Englander, p. 34.

<sup>41</sup> *Berkshire Chronicle*, Saturday 22 July 1871, p.5.

<sup>42</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 14 February 1893 (PL3/5/20).

underlying problem of crowded conditions in the workhouse especially during the winter months.

Historians have noted the expansion of medical institutions within the poor law system during the late-century, with Metropolitan infirmaries setting standards of care that national officials urged local guardians to emulate with new sick wards, or hospitals.<sup>43</sup> Although the sick were frequently equated with the aged by the Basingstoke Board, the workhouse infirmary was an important medical resource for the poor of all ages in the area. The town of Basingstoke had a small cottage hospital opened in 1878, but fees were charged for patients and chronic, or incurable cases were not accepted in the hospital.<sup>44</sup> This supports evidence from Birmingham that the strict exclusion policies of voluntary hospitals made poor law hospitals increasingly important to the aged and sick poor.<sup>45</sup> However, the Basingstoke Board resisted LGB pressure to build new hospital accommodation until the 1890s. In 1876, Basingstoke town experienced a severe outbreak of scarlet fever and a subsequent report by the Poor Law Inspector Baldwin Fleming criticised the care of the sick in the workhouse as “unsatisfactory” with insufficient precautions to prevent the spread of disease.<sup>46</sup> After much delay and outbreaks of smallpox, the Board decided to renovate an existing building on the workhouse site as an isolation hospital using the labour of inmates, so avoiding the need to take a loan for new building work.<sup>47</sup> However, but disposal of waste was a problem and all food had to be cooked in the workhouse before being passed through a gap in the fence.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Lees, pp. 278-281; Kidd, pp. 55-58; Kidd, pp. 55-8; James E. O’Neill, ‘Finding a Policy for the Sick Poor’, *Victorian Studies*, 7 (1964) 265-284 (pp.283-4).

<sup>44</sup> HRO: Notebook ‘Records of the Cottage Hospital, Basingstoke, 1867-1902’ (8M62/6).

<sup>45</sup> Ritch, p. 80.

<sup>46</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 24 March 1876 (PL3/5/14).

<sup>47</sup> TNA: Correspondence, 3 October 1884 (MH 12/10690), unions could obtain loans for building schemes, but no government grants were available.

<sup>48</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 16 January 1885 (PL3/5/17).

The isolation of patients with infectious diseases was an effective treatment during this period, but such facilities were used periodically and this helps to partly explain the reluctance of the Basingstoke guardians to build a brand new isolation hospital, especially when the town council had built a public isolation hospital for the town in the 1880s. In addition, the reluctance of the Board to borrow money was due to an unwillingness to increase poor rates during a time of agricultural depression that affected many of the guardians as farmers and landowners.<sup>49</sup>

By the 1890s, the overcrowded conditions for the sick and elderly in the workhouse were the subject of critical reports by the Poor Law Inspector Baldwin Fleming that helped initiate a battle amongst the guardians over whether to build a new infirmary for the workhouse inmates.<sup>50</sup> The issue occupied considerable time in board meetings, hence the Minutes, as well as being covered by the town's newspaper the *Hampshire and Berkshire Gazette*. In March 1895, Fleming's annual report criticised the wards as "scarcely sufficient" for the care of the sick with no paid night nurse, no proper bathrooms and no children's sick ward.<sup>51</sup> The Board agreed to build a new, separate infirmary, but a month later voted to delay any decision for six months and form a committee to investigate the matter.<sup>52</sup> Aware of a new political culture since all guardians were now elected, some guardians appealed for public support in letters to the *Gazette*. Reverend Bigg-Wither urged the "guardians and ratepayers" to ignore statements about the unnecessary cost of a new infirmary from Rev Canon Willes and to support better care for their poor, "sick brethren."<sup>53</sup> However, the reluctance of many

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Turner, 'Agriculture, 1860-1914' in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain: Volume 2 Economic Maturity, 1860-1939*, ed. by Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 133-159 (p. 141).

<sup>50</sup> Arguments amongst the guardians are covered in chapter 2.

<sup>51</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 4 March 1895 (PL3/5/21).

<sup>52</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 22 March 1895 (PL3/5/21).

<sup>53</sup> *Gazette*, Saturday 22 June 1895, p.3.

guardians to commit to the infirmary scheme was demonstrated by the decision to rescind the project by fifteen votes against seven votes to build, placing the Board in conflict with the LGB.<sup>54</sup> The Canon argued that building a new infirmary would raise the poor rates unnecessarily when the old isolation hospital standing idle and be reused. While the reforming guardians maintained that provision for the sick and aged in the workhouse failed to meet current standards of medical care indicating changing perceptions of medical treatment.<sup>55</sup> The Board decided with fifteen votes to twelve votes to re-arrange the workhouse wards as well as converting the chapel into a male sick ward and turning the old isolation hospital for the old women's ward.<sup>56</sup> The LGB protested, but reluctantly accepted the alterations since it was too late in the year to begin building work.<sup>57</sup> At the end of the year, Fleming reported back to Whitehall that he believed the views of the guardians were changing as they had recently agreed to purchase some more land to enlarge the workhouse site.<sup>58</sup> The Board finally agreed to build a new infirmary with twenty-two votes in favour against four in 1897 following another highly critical report from Fleming.<sup>59</sup> The Minutes show that once committed the Broad embraced the infirmary scheme and took the opportunity to update facilities in the workhouse as well. Patients moved into the new infirmary in the spring of 1900.<sup>60</sup> The reluctance to build a new infirmary arose from the unwillingness to incur expenditure that might increase the poor rates, however pressure from the LGB and possibly public opinion played a part in persuading the Board to build a new infirmary.

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<sup>54</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 20 September 1895 (PL3/5/22).

<sup>55</sup> *Gazette*, Saturday 28 September 1895, p.6.

<sup>56</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 18 October 1895 (PL/5/22).

<sup>57</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 29 November 1895 (PL3/5/22).

<sup>58</sup> TNA: Correspondence, 21 December 1895 (MH 12/10696).

<sup>59</sup> HRO: Minutes book, 4 May 1897 (PL3/5/22).

<sup>60</sup> HRO: Documents of Thomas Arter (154A07/2).

It can be seen that the Basingstoke guardians began slowly to adopt special treatment for certain categories of the workhouse inmates during the late nineteenth century. The Board were slow to implement a boarding-out scheme for workhouse children and maintained its own school until the late-century as a result of local circumstances. Yet, the Board provided specialist schools for children with disabilities and special trips for workhouse children with female volunteers, later guardians, taking a leading role in promoting child welfare. In addition, the Board made efforts to improve conditions for aged inmates, but were hampered by rapidly rising numbers of elderly inmates during the late century. However, the Board were reluctant to consider building new hospital facilities and converted an existing building as the isolation hospital in the 1880s. The decision to build a new workhouse infirmary in the 1890s was an important step towards specialized care, but only reached after much argument amongst the guardians, pressure from the LGB and possibly public opinion. The slow introduction of specialized treatment for workhouse inmates was in part due to the reluctance of the Board to agree to any large expenditure that might increase the poor rates, but also to local circumstances.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study set out to consider to the implementation of the Poor Law in the Basingstoke Union from 1870 to 1900, and to what extent did the Basingstoke Board of Guardians put into effect reforms, or were opponents to change, in responding to central government social policies. Until the mid-1890s, the membership of the Board was drawn from the gentry and local elites with family, business and political links, plus connections through religious affiliation. The property qualification for guardians and nepotism helped to ensure continuity of membership and social attitudes for much of this period. The majority of the guardians represented rural parishes being generally farmers with a significant contingent of clergy, although town guardians came from more varied occupational backgrounds. The desire to keep the poor rates low affected policy responses and was central to an unusual period of discord concerning the building of the new hospital in the 1890s. Yet, the role of the guardians expanded considerably during this period with responsibilities for the health and environment providing evidence for the expansion of government at the local level. The introduction of local government legislation during the 1890s did not radically alter the operation of the Board as the existing guardians were re-elected, but female guardians were elected for the first time with an enlarged town contingent of guardians.

The Board of Guardians sought to reduce the cost of outdoor relief and comply with national policy in adopting 'crusade against outdoor relief' during the late-century. The Basingstoke rules on outdoor relief limited poor relief to some of the 'deserving paupers' who had been previously granted outdoor relief. In addition, moral criteria were added to the economic criteria of being destitute before the poor qualified for outdoor relief, but the Board reserved

the right to allow exceptions to the rules. The implementation of the 'crusade' had a considerable impact on the local poor and figures collected by the guardians show a substantial drop in the number of outdoor paupers in the 1870s with no return to earlier levels of relief during later decades. Yet, there is evidence that the actual enforcement of retrenchment was not as strict as suggested by the rules themselves and the Board failed to restrict medical relief. However, the Board were slower to introduce special treatment for children, the sick and the aged in the workhouse. Although the guardians did not implement a boarding-out scheme for children largely due to local circumstances, the Board took pains to provide specialist schools for children with disabilities and some special treatment for other children in the workhouse. The guardians were sympathetic to the plight of the aged as evidenced by efforts to improve the accommodation and diet, but struggled with the rising numbers of aged and sick inmates over the late-century. The building of the new workhouse infirmary in the late-1890s represented an important step towards specialized treatment for the sick and aged poor in keeping with national welfare policy.

This study has shown that the Basingstoke Board of Guardians were cautious reformers who generally sought to introduce the reforms in the Poor Law proposed by national officials. However the Board's response was qualified by a reluctance to make financial commitments that might lead to increasing the poor rates and difficulties arising from local circumstances. Nevertheless, the Board did make significant changes in the provision of both outdoor and indoor relief during the late-century providing evidence to support the revisionist approach to the New Poor Law that advocates there were changes in the ethos of the late-century system. The study supports the arguments of historians such as MacKinnon and Hurren that the

enforcement of the ‘crusade against outdoor relief’ had a considerable impact upon the poor.<sup>1</sup> It also adds depth of the understanding of effect of this policy by showing that the ‘crusade’ did have a significant impact in rural unions contrary to earlier assessments limiting its effects largely to urban areas. Also, the Basingstoke rules on outdoor relief did present an important break with previous practice as argued by Hurren, but having said that the guardians were not consistent in their enforcement of their own rules and there was a degree of continuity in actual practices. Moreover, the implementation of the ‘crusade’ in the Basingstoke Union does not support Hurren’s argument that the severity of retrenchment produced a political reaction from voters in the 1890s. This study adds a local case study in a rural union to expand the understanding of the development of specialized treatment during the late-century identified by historians in more general studies of the Victorian Poor Law system. The evidence from the Basingstoke workhouse supports Ritch’s argument that local workhouses were important providers of care for the aged and sick poor in certain areas.<sup>2</sup> In addition, this study helps to enlarge historians’ understanding of the Poor Law guardians during the late-century by showing that the Board maintained a membership of local elites that was not greatly altered by legislation in the 1890s, although the limited evidence supports King’s positive assessment of the impact of female guardians.<sup>3</sup>

The study has focused on the last three decades of the nineteenth century and there remains scope to build a more nuanced understanding of the operation of the Poor Law during this period. There have been relatively few studies of boards of guardians and limited detailed

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<sup>1</sup> Mary MacKinnon, ‘English Poor Law Policy and the Crusade Against Outrelief’, *Journal of Economic History*, 47 (1987) 603-627; Elizabeth T. Hurren, *Protesting About Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late-Victorian England 1870-1900* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Alistair Ritch, ‘English Poor Law Institutional Care for Older People: Identifying the ‘Aged and Infirm’ and the ‘Sick’ in Birmingham Workhouse, 1852-1912’, *Social History of Medicine*, 27 (2013) 64-88.

<sup>3</sup> Steven King, “‘We Might Be Trusted’: Female Poor Law Guardians and the Development of the New Poor Law: The Case of Bolton, England, 1880-1906’, *International Review of Social History*, 49 (2004) 27-46.

work on rural workhouses during this period. In addition, more work needs to be done on the additional roles undertaken by guardians as part of late-century local government with responsibilities for health and environment. The Basingstoke Union continued to operate until 1930 and there has been little study of its operations during the twentieth century. As local records are released after one hundred years, it is now possible to consider the Poor Law at the local level in relation to the welfare reforms of the Liberal government of the Edwardian era as well as the impact of the First World War and beyond.

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