Lifecycle Poverty and Women’s Experience of the Farnborough Workhouse (Bromley, Kent), 1845-1881

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Dedicated to

*Lucy Hill*  
*(1976-2019)*
Destitute women in Victorian society were trapped between contradictory expectations. On the one hand religious theories stressed women’s natural fragility as better suited for domestic duties; on the other hand, women were expected to work, support themselves and their children. When those roles collided, the most vulnerable women were often trapped in lifecycle poverty. This dissertation examines women’s life events such as pregnancies, motherhood, illnesses, widowhood and ageing; and it investigates to what degree those elements had an impact on increased periods of their impoverishment and reliance on workhouses.

The dissertation focuses on Farnborough workhouse in Bromley, which was opened in 1845 and operated until its transition into a hospital in 1907. The workhouse has a rich and fascinating history, and therefore it makes a good local case study and an excellent addition to the historiography on the subject of poor laws and their effect on women. There is a considerable collection of primary sources available to study, however to build a more comprehensive picture this dissertation centres on Farnborough’s early years from 1845 until 1881.

A number of conclusions are drawn from the study, which is divided into three key sections. The first part focuses on national historiography and demonstrates that poor law administrators on national level did not address the reasons behind women’s lifecycle poverty. The next section brings into focus Farnborough workhouse. It argues that the local guardians were preoccupied with everyday running of the institution, but the implications of long-term destitution among their female paupers did not concern them
above their line of duty. The third part gives a voice to Farnborough women. It concludes that for some young, single and healthy women the workhouse offered a chance to regain control over their lives. However, for many mothers, widows and sick inmates, Farnborough offered immediate protection, but in a long-term it did not positively alter the course of their poverty-stricken lives.
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List of Abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Bromley Archive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNA</td>
<td>British Newspaper Archive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some material from the first year of the Master’s (module A825) has been used, however no part of this dissertation has been previously submitted for any other university.

I confirm that this dissertation is entirely my own work.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Located nine miles south of London’s Charing Cross, during the nineteenth century Bromley rose from a small village to become a popular suburb of London. The 1841 census shows that Bromley town had 4,002 residents and this grew to 15,200 in 1881. The task of looking after the growing population fell upon Bromley Poor Law Union, which was formed on the 19th May 1836. The union covered 64 square miles and elected 17 guardians to look after 16 local parishes. Parliamentary demand to cut down outdoor relief eventually led to the Union building one large workhouse for its poorest residence. It became known as Farnborough workhouse.

This dissertation focuses on the treatment of female adults in Farnborough and examines life event factors, which brought them to the workhouse. Chapter Two starts the wider historiography and investigates the reasons behind female poverty in Victorian England and the position of the government in addressing gender related destitution. This section evaluates that the lack of male provider and outdoor relief pushed poor women deeper into pauperism and dependency on a workhouse. Chapter Three focuses on the relationship of the state with Bromley administrators and the impact of their policies on Farnborough. This section looks into the workhouse premises, staff, food rationing as well as the inmate’s access to medicine and hygiene. It also investigates how external institutions such as the parliament, charities and local press perceived the policies implemented by the guardians. The evidence from the research shows that charities tried
to ease the poverty level in workhouses, however women continued to experience increased destitution under direct care of the welfare administrators. The experience of Farnborough’s women is the subject of Chapter Four. The study in this section looks at admissions, referrals, burial, baptism, census and disciplinary records. It concludes that young single mothers with children and sick widows were the two main groups of women dependent on the workhouse. It also draws on the theme that while the workhouse provided destitute women with temporary home, it did not help them in reducing poverty in the long term.

The key primary sources are the Bromley Union’s Minutes Books, which document the daily management of the workhouse and the attitude of the Guardians towards national policies and the inmates\(^1\). Evidence provided from other sources, such as Burial and Baptism Records shows that fifteen per cent of parish babies were born to single mothers and that the lack of financial support from the male breadwinners and the state forced single mothers into the Farnborough workhouse. The impact of life events on female impoverishment is also evident from Census records, which show that sixty per cent of workhouse women were elderly, sick or widowed. This points to the conclusion that while the governing body blamed poverty on the laziness of the able-bodied paupers, life factors such as pregnancies, illness, widowhood and ageing had more definite impact on admissions to the workhouse.

Wide ranges of secondary sources on Victorian poverty are used in the dissertation. Although historians agree that the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was one of the most

\(^1\) All primary sources relating to Farnborough Workhouse are held at Kent’s Bromley Archive: Poor Law Collection, stored under reference 846GBy*
important pieces of social legalisation ever endorsed by the British parliament to address the welfare issues, they differ in their opinion on the gendered effect of the poor laws. Pat Thane\textsuperscript{2}, David Englander\textsuperscript{3} and Sonya O. Rose\textsuperscript{4} argue that female poverty was more severe because women were more likely to look after children, and they were more financially affected by low wage, government’s policies and gendered factors such as pregnancies. Anna Clark adds that male dominated trade unions fought for men’s earning, by preventing women’s wages undercutting men.\textsuperscript{5} Catherine Conley, who focused her research on criminality in Kent, provides evidence that Victorian judges used social hierarchy and respectability to side with men accused of raping domestic servants or providing maintenance for children born outside marriage\textsuperscript{6}. Susan Woodall also lists gendered discrimination as a poverty factor, stating that prostitution, unwanted pregnancies and social condemnation were a significant reason behind female downfall and their increased impoverishment\textsuperscript{7}. Historian Anthony Brundage adds that the lack of education and skills prevented many women from gaining employment and supporting themselves financially.\textsuperscript{8}

While most historians agree that life events such as illness and losing a job were among major reasons behind poverty, some academics disagree with a theory that the situation of women was worse than that of impoverished men. Steven King suggests that elderly men were more likely to be refused help altogether as widows had a greater chance to be moved

\textsuperscript{3} Poverty and Poor Law Reform in 19\textsuperscript{th} Century Britain, 1834-1914 (London: Routledge, 2013), p.18
\textsuperscript{4} Limited Livelihoods; Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England (London, Routledge, 1992), p. 75
\textsuperscript{6} ‘The Unwritten Law: Criminal Justice in Victorian Kent’ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)
\textsuperscript{7} ‘The Origins and purpose of the Cambridge Female Refuge, 1838-1853; in A826 Module Dissertations (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2019), p.10
\textsuperscript{8} The English Poor Laws 1700-1930 (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p.12
from outdoor relief into workhouses. Sarah Wise claims that old women were more likely to remain with their families. Wise argues that ‘so long as they could perform household duties and take care of children, women were an asset to a family, unlike old men’. Nigel Goose, who studied poverty in Hertfordshire, also came to a conclusion that men suffered more than women. Goose claims that seasonal factors such as unemployment in winter months meant that poverty affected men equally hard. Steven Page also questions the importance of being a woman arguing that life events such as unemployment and illness affected the poorest in the society equally, regarding of their gender.

The dissertation draws on known themes of poor laws and its impact on Victorian society, however the study has unique points. In 1846 and 1847 the House of Commons and newspapers debated the subject of food rationing in workhouses, and Farnborough was mentioned alongside Andover as examples of government’s failures. Public outcry over the workhouse starvation scandals led to revision of poor laws reforms. However despite its historical importance and size, to date no research of Farnborough workhouse has been undertaken and published by poor law historians. The subject of gender related poverty also retains some gaps therefore the rationale for this study is to contribute some original, and hopefully illuminating material.

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13 A short story of the Farnborough workhouse has been published by the author of the dissertation in Social History section of Discover Your Ancestry magazine ‘The changing fortunes of a workhouse’, (August 2019), pp.12-17
Chapter 2

Lifecycle of female poverty

This chapter argues that gender and life cycle were crucial features of female poverty in Victorian times. The gender related impoverishment affected mainly three groups of women: the young, often pregnant girls, who lacked education and skills; abandoned wives with their dependent children; and the elderly, sickly widows. The study touches on the theme that the Poor Law administrators did not address the reasons behind destitution and discusses lifecycle poverty in the context of attitudes towards females and their role around 1845-1881. The study is supported with examples of female inmates in English workhouses, with a focus on Farnborough workhouse in Bromley.

Policy and gender

Between 1801 and 1830 the British population increased by two thirds to fifteen million, while domestic spending on welfare accounted for one-fifth of the national expenditure. The rapid growth of population and the soaring costs alarmed the government, which agreed that the welfare system needed a major reshaping. Based on a report by Edwin Chadwick, John Bird Sumner and Nassau Senior the parliament passed new legalisations aimed at reducing the costs of pauperism. The Poor Law Amendment Act (also known as the New Poor Law) was signed on 14 August 1834. Born out of national need to modernise the old Elizabethan system, which had been in place since 1601, the Act marked a radical new change, in which the poor relief was agreed and distributed. The

14 Paul Laurence, MA History, Module Material A825, Part 1, Introduction to Block 6 (Milton Keynes, The Open University, 2007), p.6
key idea of the new welfare system was to forbid cash payments to encourage able-bodied men to find work instead of depending on state charity. Assistance to others was to be given only within purpose-built workhouses, boarding schools or in asylums. The architects of New Poor Law policies of 1834 reinforced beliefs that men were responsible for the economic welfare of families, while women’s job was to look after their husbands, maintain their homes and nurture their children. As Pat Thane explains Edwin Chadwick and his colleague George Nicholls ‘took for granted the universality of the stable two-parent family, primarily dependent upon the father’s wage (…). Hence the poverty of women and children was thought to be remediable by the increased earnings of husbands and fathers’. Simultaneously, if that was not possible, the lawmakers saw able-bodied females as capable workers, who should support their existence through ‘gainful employment’. Chadwick objected to gender specific relief seeing women as ‘individuals responsible for their own destiny, rather than victims of male perfidy’. In consequence, the poorest women had inadequate support from Chadwick’s office.

While the Poor Law Commissioners saw no objections in destitute women taking up an employment, the nineteenth-century medical, social and religious theories stressed women’s natural fragility, emphasizing that physical weakness made women better suited for motherhood and domesticity. Additionally, as Anna Clark points out ‘male trade unionists’ primary goal was to keep up men’s earnings, by preventing low female wages from undercutting (…) men’.

18 Anna Clark, p.262
This put the poorest women in an awkward and contrasting position. As wives, mothers of small children or elderly widows they were expected to stay home. Equally they played an important part as wage earners, supporting family economies, while struggling to find and sustain regular employment while holding babies, dealing with sickness or old age. Furthermore, as the Poor Law administrators focused on reducing outdoor relief to able-bodied paupers, female poverty level increased. Anna Clark concludes that ‘local guardians tried to prevent this problem by subsidising female earnings; but for Chadwick, the only alternative was the workhouse’.\textsuperscript{19} This dissertation suggests that the workhouse remains a significant factor, where gender related lifecycle of poverty is also evident and follows the pattern of academic findings.

\begin{center}
*IMAGE REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS*
\end{center}

Image 2.1 Portrait of social reformer Edwin Chadwick (Getty Images)

\textsuperscript{19} Anna Clark, p.267
Young females

According to the 1861 census 31 per cent of women in Kent over the age of twenty were not married’.\textsuperscript{20} The proportion among the poorest women with no male protection, own income, education or skills, relying on support from workhouses follows this pattern. The statistics in Bromley’s Farnborough workhouse provide the evidence that young females formed the second largest group of destitute women in workhouses. Three charts based on 1851, 1871 and 1881 censuses (Tables 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4, p.9) show that 28 per cent of female inmates in Farnborough were young women under the age of thirty, and only one of them was married.

Most of the young women entering the workhouse were pregnant or already had a baby. The Poor Laws of 1834 meant that single mothers had no legal rights to social care. The regulations embodied the idea that the mother of an illegitimate child should be its sole support, however if she could not manage, the mother and child, or the two would be placed in the workhouse. As David Englander notes ‘the gendered assumptions of the New Poor Law were highlighted by the treatment of bastardy. Unmarried mothers, it was decided, were to bear the shame of their offspring alone’\textsuperscript{21} Sonya O. Rose agrees that the Poor Laws were an instrument of moral regulation for women explaining that ‘whereas the law was silent about widows and deserted wives, it singled out unmarried mothers and their children for disapprobation’.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21} Poverty and Poor Law Reform in 19th Century Britain, 1834-1914 (London: Routledge, 2013), p.18
\textsuperscript{22} Limited Livelihoods; Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 54
### Age and marital status of women in 1851 workhouse census

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<th>Age Group</th>
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<th>Unmarried (23)</th>
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<td>40-49</td>
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Table 2.2 Chart based of 1851 census of female inmates in Farnborough workhouse.

### Age and marital status of women in 1871 workhouse census

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Table 2.3 Chart based of 1871 census of female inmates in Farnborough workhouse.

### Age and marital status of women in 1881 workhouse census

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<th>Age Group</th>
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<th>Unmarried (33)</th>
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Table 2.4 Chart based of 1881 census of female inmates in Farnborough workhouse.

Note: The 1861 census from Farnborough Workhouse is missing.
The gender related lifecycle poverty was also evident to Victorian contemporaries. Among them was Victorian charity worker Henrietta Weston Barnett, who visited workhouses in Whitechapel and described the findings in her reports. She wrote that ‘from June 1877 to June 1878, in the seven unions of East London alone there have been no less than 253 young girl mothers.’

Barnett recognised that lifecycle events play a role in female poverty as she explained that the mother ‘on leaving the workhouse, honestly tries to get work at sack-making, factory-work, anything (...) but it is a hard, an almost impossible task. The care of the child impedes the work.’ To reduce the lifecycle of poverty in young mothers Mrs Barnett recommended that women ‘whose maternal feeling wants frequent contact with a child (...) get a place, where the mistress, will allow her servant often to see the little one’, while those single mothers ‘whose sense of shame is stronger than the love for her child’ is placed with a family, which will separate them, but continue to support the child by sending money.

Carolyn A. Conley also found examples of lifecycle poverty among young Kentish women, describing one case study as ‘a poignant example of a parent caught in the contradictions of the system’. Mary Pevy, a thirty-year-old unwed mother from Margate gave birth in a Dover workhouse in 1877. After leaving the workhouse, Mary took a job as a cook and left the baby with her neighbours, who did not feed the little girl. Mary was arrested for abandoning the child and sentenced to three months in jail, during which, the baby was taken back to the workhouse and recovered her health. When she was released, Mary had no job and begged the authorities to keep her child in the workhouse, but her

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24 Ibid. p.4  
25 Ibid. p.5  
26 Ibid.  
27 Carolyn A. Conley, p.101
request was denied. When after leaving the workhouse, her child died from hunger, Mary was arrested for manslaughter.\footnote{28}

A closer research of workhouse inmates in Farnborough show similar pattern of gender related lifecycle poverty and reliance on workhouse aid among young females. Jane Martin and Mary Fisher were also single mothers. Both 29 years old, they lived in Farnborough with their children: 8 years old Mary Martin, 2 years old Jane Martin and 9-month-old Sarah Fisher. The 1881 census also lists 22 years old Mary Littejohn with her infant 8-month-old son Henry. Some young females were regularly readmitted to workhouses because they were not capable of supporting themselves. Among them was Naomi Aris, who left Farnborough in 1852 when she was offered a job in local mill, but ‘having been discharged from the Mill, as left entirely destitute’\footnote{29} she was readmitted into the workhouse two years later. Her sister Sophie Aris joined her in 1857 ‘due to bad leg as well as being pregnant, and not being able to work’.\footnote{30} Historian Marjorie Levine-Clark, who researched female inmates in Midhurst Union Workhouse, agrees that like Sophie Aris, many girls were too ill and thus ‘no able to take a situation’.\footnote{31}

Among single women who were able to work, the lifecycle poverty was often a result of lack of education, skills and work experience. Being a domestic servant was by far the most common occupations given by workhouse females. Tables 2.5 and 2.6 (p.12) show that this was also the case in Farnborough workhouse in both 1851 and 1881.

\footnote{28}{Carolyn A. Conley, p.102}
\footnote{29}{Bromley Archive, \textit{Out-book Volume 1845-1858}, p.241}
\footnote{30}{Bromley Archive, \textit{Minutes Book 1856-57}, 17 February 1857, p.375}
Domestic Servant | 28  
Factory/cotton/mill | 3  
Charwoman | 2  
Agricultural | 8  
Laundress | 2  
Bucket Weaver | 1  
Needlewman | 1  
Domestic nurse | 3  
None (imbecile) | 3  
Fish Hawker | 3  

| Total | 54 |

Table 2.5 Occupations for female inmates in Farnborough workhouse in 1851 Census.

| Domestic Servant | 54  
Factory/cotton/mill | 4  
Charwoman | 3  
Agricultural | 2  
Laundress | 2  
Book folder, paper maker | 2  
Needlewman | 1  
School teacher (imbecile) | 1  
None (imbecile) | 5  
Blind | 1  

| Total | 75 |

Table 2.6 Occupations for female inmates in Farnborough workhouse in 1881 Census.

Victorian reformer Mary Carpenter, who campaigned for better training for girls into domestic service, claimed that the gender related poverty deepened because girls emerge from workhouses ‘quite unacquainted with the way to boil a potato or make a family pudding’.\textsuperscript{32} Susan Woodall explains that young desperate women who had no skills often used occupations such as domestic servant, dressmaker or laundress, to simply cover up prostitution.\textsuperscript{33} The problem of ‘fallen women’ was widely associated with female

\textsuperscript{33} “The Origins and purpose of the Cambridge Female Refuge, 1838-1853” in \textit{A826 Module Dissertations Examples} (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2019), p.10
destitution. Women resorted to prostitution because they had neither skills, access to outdoor relief nor family members who could support them. The idea that women should be dutiful wives, financially supported by their fathers or husbands was not compatible with the reality that many young females remained unmarried mothers, often with no skills and prospects to support themselves, other than falling into prostitution. Consequently, their gender and status had a profound impact on the level and lifecycle of poverty.

Abandoned wives and mothers

Conley notes that the nineteenth century women 'had to be strong and self-sufficient in order to survive. But self-sufficiency was not necessarily an admirable trait for a woman'.34 Victorian married women were under legal control of their husbands. As Conley highlights ‘women were not slaves, but some legal scholars did regard them as possessions (...) woman belonged to one man, going from her father’s possession to that of her husband’.35 The Poor Law commissioners believed that men have gender related responsibility, yet historical records show that many workhouse inmates were married deserted mothers. Levine-Clark who studied workhouse admission records in East Sussex notes that ‘aside from elderly widows, the majority of adult women in workhouses were there because of the desertion’.36

The pattern in Farnborough is similar to the workhouses researched by Levine-Clark. The 1851 census lists 36 years old Ann Carter, who resided in the Farnborough workhouse with her seven children: all age from one to thirteen. The 1871 census lists Mary Gregory

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34 Carolyn A. Conley, p.79
35 Ibid. pp.76-77
36 Marjorie Levine-Clark, p.120
with her four children age from five to fourteen and the 1881 census shows deserted charwoman Phoebe Rudland with her five children: Annie age 12, Henry 9, Sarah 7, William 3 and 3-month-old David. The Guardian Minutes Books also record many examples of abandoned wives with dependent children. Bromley Union agreed to admit Elizabeth Mumford and her four children, deserted by Charles Mumford\(^{37}\) and Mrs Hussian and her three children, abandoned by her husband, whom the Guardians advised to be accepted immediately ‘without the usual proceedings’.\(^{38}\)

The case studies from Farnborough demonstrate that the majority of married women in workhouses had dependent children and husbands, whom for various reasons did not care for their families. The individual cases also show that the New Poor Law commissioners failed to establish which took higher priority: motherhood or work, and in result inadequately supported women in their role as both parents and breadwinners. As Sarah Wise points out ‘on the one hand economically self-sufficient women were to be praised for their tenacity and independence; on the other hand they were viewed as part of the disease afflicting working-class’.\(^{39}\) The national state refused to pay outdoor relief but the government also had no clear strategy as how to approach the problem of supporting deserted wives without encouraging overwhelmed, sick or unemployed husbands to abandon their large families. There was no uniform policy and as a result ‘confusion reigned. Mothers were refused help if they had one dependent child, while deserted wives with more children were denied support for the first twelve months of their desertion’.\(^{40}\)

The cases of married females in workhouses show that parental poverty was fuelled by

\(^{37}\) Minutes Book 1859-1861, p.70
\(^{38}\) Minutes Book 1845-1858, p.101
\(^{40}\) David Englander, Poverty and Poor Law Reform in 19th Century Britain, 1834-1914 (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp.18-19
tragic familial circumstances and the lack of financial support by the state. In consequence women were put in the state of legal limbo and lifecycle hardship, which was often out of their hands. The lack of state support for abandoned mothers with children is an example where gender and lifecycle related poverty is perhaps the most palpable.

Widows and the elderly

In 1855 Amelia Dolding was 16 years old when she married Isaac. As her husband lay dying thirteen years later, they had had seven children. Amelia entered the Farnborough workhouse no fewer than 24 times, often taking with her six youngest children. Amelia was not born a pauper; she only became destitute when as a widow she was left penniless while still caring for her young children.\textsuperscript{41} Her case was not an exception. Julia Champion, a widow age 34, resided in Farnborough with her children George (age 14), William (11), Margaret (7) and James (3).\textsuperscript{42} As tables 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 (p. 9) show, the largest female group among workhouse inmates in Farnborough were indeed widows.

The situation of younger widows such as Amelia and Julia was similar to abandoned wives as they also struggled to combine parenting with breadwinning and earning enough to support their young families without the support of a man. Marjorie Levine–Clark points out that this ‘illuminates the complex and sometimes conflicting ways gender operated in early Victorian English poor law theory and practice’.\textsuperscript{43} Anna Clark notes that ‘the question how widows with children could be expected to work and care for their children

\textsuperscript{42} Census 1881 of Farnborough Workhouse Census inmates
\textsuperscript{43} Marjorie Levine-Clark, p.107
also exposed the contradiction between reformers’ moralistic celebration of domesticity and the principle of political economy that all should be left sufficient’.44

In 1871 the Poor Law Board was replaced with the Local Government Board, which laid down new laws that widows should send their children into the workhouse and earn their own livings outside it.45 However the majority of widows were also elderly or had increased health problems. Workhouse records reveal the extent of the problem. In the 1851 census the largest numbers of Farnborough inmates were in the age group between sixty and seventy. In the later censuses the widows between seventy and eighty, also form the largest group. Stephen Page who studied the inmates in the Leicester Workhouse in 1881 found a similar pattern. Table 2.7 (p.17), completed by Page, shows that the elderly also made the highest number in workhouse admissions (38.3%).46 Data from Farnborough (Table 2.8, p.17) supports the findings as the percentage of elderly inmates is even higher (47.77%). The reason behind is that although aged widows were considered ‘deserving paupers’ and some received outdoor relief, not all widows qualified to get government aid. As Samantha Williams points out there was no concept of ‘retirement’47, therefore for the elderly without provision from the state, the only alternative was the workhouse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group in Leicester Workhouse</th>
<th>No of cases</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

44 Anna Clark, p.271
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group in Farnborough Workhouse</th>
<th>No of cases</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.88</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.72</td>
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<td>21-30</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7.69</td>
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<td>31-45</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10.93</td>
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<tr>
<td>46-60</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8.91</td>
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<tr>
<td>61+</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>47.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.8 Age group of Farnborough Workhouse inmates in 1881 Census (Author’s own).

The problem of lifecycle poverty among the ageing population was recognised not only by modern historians, but also among Victorian contemporaries. A civil servant named Geoffrey Drage concluded in his book ‘The problem of the Aged Poor’ that the majority of paupers were widows whose main occupation earlier in life had been to keep house for their husbands: ‘the women had had no opportunity to save anything for their old age, and when their husbands died, they usually lost their sole means of financial support’.\(^{48}\) It demonstrates that widows and older women were particularly trapped in gender and lifecycle poverty caused by the absence of inherence from their husbands, limited labour market, health issues, as well as lack of regular state provision in the last years of life.

\(^{48}\) Classic Reprints 1895 (Charleston: Nabu Press, 2012), p.150
**Contrasting views**

Not all cases of admission into workhouse were related to deeply rooted lifecycle of poverty. Levine-Clark investigated females applying for a place in a workhouse and found that ‘the workhouse was a temporary stopping place for single women between jobs who had no lodging of their own’.\(^{49}\) In other cases, wealthier women were put into a workhouse to protect them from domestic violence. As historian Lucy Williams points out, in the Victorian period ‘women could suffer appalling abuse within their own homes’.\(^{50}\) In one example, the vice chairman of Newent Union, John Cadle, noted that one husband ‘treated the wife with great brutality’\(^{51}\) and agreed to offer the wife, Mrs Hill, a place in a workhouse. In such cases, domestic violence and not a lifecycle of poverty was a major reason for admission into a workhouse.

There is also a disagreement among academics questioning the gender element of poverty. Pat Thane argues that female poverty was harsher and was due to the facts that women tended to live longer, they were more severely affected by marriage breakdown than men, they were less likely to re-marry, their work opportunities were more limited; and that, when they could work, their wages were generally much lower.\(^{52}\) Other academics disagree. Karel Williams, who studied the implementation of poor laws noted that ‘relief to unemployed men was virtually abolished after 1850’.\(^{53}\) Steven King suggests that elderly men were more likely to be refused help altogether as widows had a

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\(^{49}\) Marjorie Levine-Clark, p.122
\(^{50}\) ‘Wayward Women: Female Offending in Victorian England’, Pen and Sword History, p.108
\(^{51}\) Marjorie Levine-Clark, p.122
greater chance to be moved from outdoor relief into workhouses. Nigel Goose agrees that in Hertfordshire men suffered more than women from seasonal factors and therefore in the winter months poverty was worse for male paupers. Goose also believes that ‘female domestic skills may have meant that they were better to look after themselves than were elderly widowers’. Indeed, there is some evidence that many fathers and widowers relied on workhouses equally to women when their wives passed away. An 1851 census records from Farnborough list 41-year-old widower Richard Chapman, a labourer, who resided in the workhouse with his children Lucy (age 14), Thomas (6), George (4). The 1881 census shows that out of 178 adult Farnborough workhouse inmates, 103 were male, in comparison to 75 females. In Leicester workhouse Stephen Page calculated that out of 847 inmates, 500 were male and 347 female. David Englander also argues that elderly men were particularly prominent among the inmate population. Englander suggests that old women, being less helpless than old men, were more likely to remain with their families, noting that ‘so long as they could perform household duties and take care of children, women were an asset unlike old men who, as a result of the sexual division of labour, were generally less useful around the house’. King, Goose, Englander, Williams and Page argue that cuts to outdoor relief and life elements such as unemployment, old age, sickness and widowhood affected the poorest in society equally hard and regardless of their gender.

Conclusion

54 Steven King, Poverty and welfare in England (Manchester: Manchester University press, 2000), p. 391
57 David Englander, p.34
This chapter has sought to show that gender and lifecycle played an important role in poverty in Victorian England. A number of conclusions can be drawn from the study. Firstly, political and social assumptions about gender shaped the manner in which destitution was understood and handled by the New Poor lawmakers. After the legalisation of the 1834 the commissioners as well as guardians remained uncertain as to whether the primary role of the poverty-stricken female was work or home. On the one hand women were considered as fragile and suited for domestic duties, leaving the breadwinning to their fathers or husbands; on the other hand, poor women were expected to support themselves and their children by finding work. It trapped women between contradictory expectations and with lack of regular state support, in workhouses.

If gender played a significant role in Victorian poverty, the lifecycle elements were equally prominent. The most destitute were often pregnant single young girls who had no skills; the abandoned wives with young children, who could not earn money; and the aged, sick widows. As poor women often played an important family part as wage earners, when the number of pregnancies and children increased, their chances of lifecycle poverty also intensified. In almost all cases the absence of a male breadwinner and outdoor relief pushed women deeper in pauperism and dependency on a workhouse. The study has shown that the majority of workhouse inmates in Farnborough were also young unskilled and unemployed females, mothers with dependent children, widows and elderly; and that the ablebodiedness, so relevant to the Poor Law Commissioners, did not have an impact on poverty as much as the elements of gender and motherhood. In this chapter examples from the Farnborough workhouse provided some supportive evidence to the evaluation of lifecycle poverty; the next chapter researches the issues of gender and lifecycles much wider by exploring the Farnborough workhouse in deeper and detailed study.
Chapter 3

Farnborough Workhouse

This chapter analyses the location, the buildings, the rules and the elements such as dietary requirements and female health in the Farnborough workhouse. Focusing on the conflict between women’s needs, local response and a national position, it examines the attitudes of the local Poor Law administrators and charities towards its poorest female paupers. The second theme emerging from the study in this chapter assesses to what degree national and local managerial decisions had an impact on lifecycle poverty of Farnborough’s women. The study demonstrates that the workhouse administrators provided basic care on daily basis, however wider reasons behind gender related poverty were often not understood or addressed. The chapter concludes that Victorian Poor Law administrators in charge of Farnborough were preoccupied with tackling daily issues such as food rations, heating problems and epidemics, but due to limited financial resources, they were not able to work on longer-term solutions to relieve destitution among their female paupers. There was no national or local policy to address gender related lifecycle poverty, which in turn meant that Farnborough’s women had little chance to improve their longstanding financial situation and therefore remained trapped in the workhouse system.

Premises and rules

Farnborough workhouse (Image 3.1, p. 24) was designed by James Savage and opened on 13th March 1845. Positioned almost five miles away from the town centre, its location meant that it was out of sight for residents who did not wish to be confronted with poverty. It would also take a poor person almost two hours to reach it on foot. In line with the
national policy, the workhouse was designed to be a deterrent; and of a lower standard than homes of the poorest labourers in Bromley. Government regulations, which were focused on cost cutting, led to founding problems, which had an impact on the initial construction process. E. W. Warner notes that ‘within the month of the commencement of the building Mr Charles Kirk, the builder, was found to be using sand instead of cement (…) water has seeped into the wards, drains were blocked and the dinner bell had fallen from its mounting’.58

Female paupers were located in ‘Number Two Women’s Ward and as in many other workhouses at that time they shared beds. They were also separated from their husbands and children older than two. The inmates rose at 5am in the summer and 7am in the winter. After breakfast and prayers, the paupers went to work and they continued until lunch break, which lasted an hour. Afternoon work continued until 6pm before all inmates retired for dinner, prayers and bedtime. Farnborough paupers were allowed eight hours a week of visits, with additional Sunday meetings by appointment. They were given gendered jobs; women were asked to do cleaning, cooking, laundry as well as nursing the children and the elderly. In 1878 the clerk reported that older women were also given light tasks ‘so that they feel they are of some use’.59

The structure, rules and job allocations reveal the significance of gender in Farnborough, but also demonstrate that women were kept in poverty cycle while in the workhouse. They worked long hours, but they were not paid for their effort. It meant that they survived but remained without any prospects to save for the future, leave the workhouse with money and became financially independent. Farnborough women, like many other

58 ‘Farnborough Workhouse’ (Bromley: Archive Publication, 1998), p.3
59 BA, Minutes Book 1876-1878 (1 March 1878), p.421
female inmates across England, were ultimately trapped in lifecycle poverty created by the rules of unpaid labour while in the workhouse.

*IMAGE REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS*

Image 3.1  The Farnborough workhouse from the west. In 1936 it became Farnborough Hospital and in 2003 renamed Princess Royal Hospital.
Sources: www.workhouses.org. Photo: Peter Higginbotham (1907)
**Management and staff**

The two most important Guardians who managed Farnborough workhouse for the period of over forty years were the Chairman Viscount Sydney and Vice-Chairman George Warde Norman (Images 3.3 and 3.4, p. 29). Born John Robert Townshend, the 1st Earl of Sydney (1805-1890) was also Lord Chamberlain of the Household under Prime Ministers Lord Palmerston and William Gladstone. George Warde Norman (1793-1882) who complained that Bromley workhouse was ‘unfit for the proper accommodation of their inmates’⁶⁰, also worked as a director of the Bank of England and a governor of Guy’s Hospital. Sydney, Norman and the team of Guardians, which consisted of medical officers, chaplains, local farmers and businessmen, met every Friday. They discussed issues regarding finances, inmate admissions, referrals and discharges, the running of the workhouse as well as correspondence with the national Poor Law Commissioners (later Board) and other Unions. Although women had been allowed to stand in elections to the national Boards of Guardians since 1833, none was elected in London until 1875.⁶¹ Census records show that Farnborough employed ten members of staff; a master, a matron, one nurse, schoolteacher, schoolmistress, a porter and his wife (listed under occupation of a ‘portress’) as well as a labour master, a carpenter and a baker. The structure demonstrates that the most important persons in charge of the workhouse were distinctively male. Their managerial decisions, which lacked female viewpoints, had a profound impact on the wellbeing of female inmates.

⁶¹ The first female allowed to become a Bromley Union Guardian was Miss Isabella Frances Akers, who attended her first meeting in Farnborough on 23⁵ of May 1890.
Image 3.2 A list of Guardians present at one of their weekly meetings in 1845. There were no females among them; the decisions regarding the wellbeing of female paupers in Farnborough were made by influential local politicians, businessman, clergy and farmers.

**Dietary requirement**

On 10th December 1845 Farnborough’s medical officer Thomas H. Smith issued a malnourishment warning for the workhouse. Smith argued that the existing diet, which included bread and cheese with cold water to be given three times a week, caused starvation and suffering. When Smith recommended a diet alternation, the Guardians responded by asking the Poor Law Commissioners in Somerset House for an increase of funds to supply an additional twice-a-week soup portion and a once-a-week meat-pudding to the starved inmates. Edwin Chadwick, who was responsible for managing the Bromley Union, advised that ‘women should have the same quantities of food as 9 to 16 years of age’\(^{62}\) and he rejected the request. By 20 July 1846 other Poor Law administrators wrote

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\(^{62}\) BA, *Out-letters Volume 1845-1858*, p.86
to Bromley Union that ‘until actual evil is found to arise from it, the committee can see no sufficient reason for altering it’. Mr Tufnell, one of the twenty-six Assistant Poor Law Commissioners working with Chadwick, justified their stand by telling Bromley Union ‘that more people die of overfeeding than of starvation’. The attitude of Poor Law commissioners infuriated the Bromley Guardians, who went public with their battle. A series of letters between the guardians and the commissioners published by The Morning Post on 10th August 1846 outraged the public and reached Parliament. Fellow MPs Joseph Hume and Thomas Wakley (a founding member of The Lancet magazine) complained in The Commons that ‘woman with an infant at the breasts (…) who has committed no offence (…) she must starve on three ounces of meat per week!’ Wakley called Bromley workhouse ‘a place of misery and torture’ and argued that ‘the inquiry into the proceedings at the Andover Union presented a horrible picture of the treatment of the poor; but in Bromley, near to London, he found a worse diet table’.

The Andover Union inquiry, which Thomas Wakley mentioned in his parliamentarian speech, refers to another workhouse scandal, which exposed horrific conditions to which paupers were subjected in Hampshire. Report revealed that driven my hunger, the Andover paupers ate the marrow and gristle off putrid bones, which they were supposed to crush to make fertilizer. Further investigations revealed that the appointed Master, Mr M'Dougal, misplaced Poor Law funds towards personal needs, while the visiting Board of Andover Guardians, his friends, ignored the warnings. Bromley and Andover starvation scandals as well as the popularity of Charles Dickens novel Oliver Twist,
highlighted inhuman conditions in workhouses and fuelled public anger. This led to the replacement of the Royal Commission with the Poor Law Board in 1847. The new national agency gave unions more responsibilities, but also more control over decision-making such as dietary allowance. The effects of the changes are evident in Farnborough. The following year, on 8th March 1848 clerk Henry Nottingham placed a newspaper advert for tender to supply Bromley Union with articles for workhouses. Among the required items were: ‘good quality bread, beef, “best yellow” soap, Gloucester cheese, Irish butter, oatmeal, rice, salt, sugar, table beer as well as clothing, shoes, hats and candles’.68 The dietary crisis illustrates that Viscount Sydney and Warde Norman sympathetic stance towards the poorest led to a conflict with the Poor Law office. It demonstrates that limited financial resources were among the most difficult challenges faced by the Bromley Union. However, the Guardian’s preoccupation with food rationing, newspapers and public opinion also meant that long-term female poverty was not their priority.

The dietary conflict had a direct impact on poverty stricken female inmates, who were the silent victims of the legalisations. Farnborough women, already trapped in lifecycle poverty due to pregnancies, single parenting, sickness or old age struggled with starvation while in the workhouse. In this case, their destitution was not caused by the lack of male protection at home, but directly by the state government. The Poor Law administrators on the highest level did not work together with local Guardians to lift them out of extreme poverty; in contrast, they kept them in the state of prolonged deprivation, while they were under their care.

68 BNA, *South Eastern Gazette*, p.8
Image 3.3  A caricature of 1st Earl Sydney (1805-1890), Lord Chamberlain of the Household and a Chairman of Bromley Union.
Sources: Vanity Fair, 1st May 1869

*IMAGE REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS*

Image 3.4  George Warde Norman (1793–1882) A director of a Bank of England and an influential Vice Chairman of the Bromley Union for the period of 40 years.
Image by Neal Anthony Welland, 2012

*IMAGE REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS*
Health and hygiene

Kim Price notes that medical care in workhouses ‘was almost half a century behind equivalent services in voluntary hospitals’ stating lack of investment, low qualifications and a low nurse-to-patient ratio among the main reasons. A Sanitary Commission set up by *The Lancet* to investigate the conditions inside workhouses found that, with a rare exception, there were extremely dirty and ill ventilated. Ruth Richardson adds that ‘as there was no professional nurses to look after all the inmates, all the nursing was in many English workhouses done by the paupers’. A professional nurse called Matilda Beeton, who was the only professionally qualified staff in Rotherhithe workhouse, described her workplace as ‘crawling with vermin, and the mouldy beds full of maggots’.

Another contemporary, a Victorian campaigner Stanley Lane-Poole blamed the problem with understaffed workhouses on low salary. An average nurse worked fourteen hours a day on a salary, which amounted to around 20 pounds a year (around 2,300 pounds today). Lane-Poole explained that ‘the women required have not as a rule the means of paying for their training’ adding that many suitable women ‘would volunteer if the remuneration were higher’.

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71 Ibid, p.22
72 Ibid, p.21
Regular inspections in Farnborough show that the workhouse was clean. However, the underinvestment and staffing problems were similar. In 1863 the clerk Richard Scarr placed an advert for a nurse (Image 3.5, p.32) who ‘must be able to read and write’ and this indicates low standard of education required from nursing staff. Alex Shemmon, one of the medical officers also complained that there was just one nurse to manage the workhouse. His cynical side comment in his Medical Book that ‘there certainly is not one nurse too many’ sarcastically voice his deep frustration, which likely also represented the views of his female inmates. Shemmon was also concerned that there are only two baths for 200 inmates. It was not until 1871 when state legalisation ordering paupers to ‘be cleansed in a bath with water of suitable temperature’ was forced upon workhouses like Farnborough. The hygiene problems were not unique to Farnborough. Joan Perkins points out that in Bethnal Green workhouse ‘among 335 women inmates, there were sixty-five over 80 years old, ten totally blind and twenty-six crippled. Another one hundred were infirm. Yet, there was only one nurse, who found it utterly impossible to keep the women clean and wholesome’. Poverty stricken women struggled to maintain their health and hygiene outside the workhouse. Yet, they found that once inside, the lack of care and sanitation was equally, if not harder to maintain. In result, it pushed them deeper into obscurity, lowering their chances for employment, self-respect and social standing even further.

75 BA, Report of the Visiting Commissioners, 14th October 1863
76 BA, Minutes Books 1861-65, newspaper cutting attached to the first page
77 BA, Bromley Union Medical Book
78 BA, Pamphlet in the Minutes Book 1871-74, Section 6, Article 7 of the Pauper Regulation Act 1871
Workhouse females were also likely to live in fear of epidemics. On 17 Dec 1847 the clerk noted first outbreak of typhus.\(^{80}\) When the next epidemic erupted on 5\(^{th}\) June 1849 the authorities blamed it on the inmates, stating that ‘the influx of the class of persons into the house (…) was productive of Typhus, which was fatal to one or two regular inmates’.\(^{81}\) On 11\(^{th}\) August 1866 *The Herford Mercury and Reformer* reported a severe outbreak of cholera. Although very sick inmates were sent to (no longer existing) St John’s Hospital in London Battersea (SW11), the majority of Farnborough women suffering from an infectious disease were moved into quarantine and left to die or recover in the workhouse. The guardians also erected a tent in the grounds of the workhouse to isolate cases of scarlet fever and smallpox.\(^{82}\)

Individual cases demonstrate the wider impact of infectious diseases on women. In December 1864 domestic servant Elizabeth Allend arrived at Farnborough’s door saying that she feels unwell and it is the reason why her employer Mr Crowhurst sacked her making her homeless. Few days later the Board discovered that Elizabeth had smallpox,

\(^{80}\) BA, Minutes Books 1847-1852, 17\(^{th}\) December 1847, p.10
\(^{81}\) Out-letters Volume 1845-1858, 5\(^{th}\) June 1849, p.88
\(^{82}\) Amanda Peckham & Gill Humpy, *From the Workhouse to the Pye House: A History of Bromley Common*, (Bromley: Local History Publications, 1999), p.10
which luckily did not spread across the workhouse. The Board wrote to Mr Crowhurst pointing out that his treatment of Elizabeth was inhuman, but there was no more the Guardians could do to hold him accountable of neglect. Elizabeth’s case demonstrates the fragile situation of lower-class women when they became sick. It also demonstrates how quickly they became jobless, homeless and reliant on a workhouse. Their lifecycle poverty intensified due to lack of national protection, as employers such as Mr Crowhurst had no legal obligation to take care of sick servants.

Bromley Union did try to take some action to protect women from diseases and lack of care. In 1852 the clerk remarked on ‘attention to the increase of Small Pox (…) suggesting that every publicity should be given that gratuitous vaccination may be performed’. On 1 August 1853 The Vaccination Act made pox vaccine compulsory for newborn babies, which in turn helped Farnborough women to protect their children. In 1855 Farnborough housed 280 paupers (210 of them female) and the Board reported that ‘the inmates in this Workhouse have been remarkably healthy, and entirely free from those diseases which have sometimes prevailed in similar establishments’. One entry mentions that the clerk was ‘directed to order from Apothecaries Hall, one gallon of Cod Liver Oil for the use by the Workhouse Medical Officer’. However records also show problems. When a visiting mother of Emily Emery complained that she found her daughter’s hair ‘in the most filthy state’ the Guardians criticised the nurse Miss Harris for lack of care. In another, the clerk reported on the death of 24 years old Emma Shorter, an unmarried, former domestic servant of Mr James Bruce, who died giving birth in the

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83 BA, Minutes Book 1861-1865, January 1865, p.620
84 BA, Minutes Book 1852-1855, p.38
85 BA, Out-letters Volume 1845-1858, p.284
86 BA, Minutes Books 1858-1861, 3 February 1861, p.276
87 BA, Minutes Books 1867-1871, 28th February 1868, p.39
workhouse. Emma’s boy died unbaptized seven days later and the Guardians investigated the case as neither the doctor, the master nor the chaplain came to check on her or the newborn baby. The evidence indicates that women’s healthcare in Farnborough varied between periods of reasonably good care and times of increased risks from infectious diseases and when giving birth, made worse by the lack of basic sanitation. Deficiencies in health care and hygiene had a profound impact on their wellbeing. Too sick, pregnant or just too dirty to attract or hold on to an employment, workhouse women had little prospects for improvement. In the long-term their gender, lack of trained medical staff to provide them with care and sanitation, as well as unprotected legal status, added to their lifecycle of poverty.

Charity and support

Many positive changes in workhouses were introduced not by the Guardians, but as a result of campaigns arranged by other women. Among them was Louisa Twining (1820-1912), who in 1855 begun to organise tea parties for paupers. In her autobiography Twining (Image 3.6, p.40) described meeting a female inmate in the London Strand Workhouse in 1857 ‘she was a middle-aged woman, always sited upon a low stool for which there was just room, between two turned-up bed stands, under a window. She was quite unable to walk from some cause, and I never saw her in any other position. I shall never forget her first greeting to the only visitor she had ever had (…) this was the only ray of light in her dark and dreary life’.  

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88 BA, Minutes Books 1861-1865, 24th April and 1st May 1863, pp.298 and 302
89 *Recollections of life and work being the autobiography of Louisa Twining*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), p.117
Twining was a daughter of a wealthy tea merchant and through her social connections she formed *The Workhouse Visiting Society*, which aimed to deliver charitable aid to the inmates. Records show that Bromley guardians granted permissions to the *Workhouse Visiting Society*, welcoming their gifts and advice. Comments in *Minutes Books* confirm that they visited Farnborough at the beginning of the month and ‘the ladies brought Christmas feasts and occasional plum cake’[^90], while on another occasion the clerk noted that ‘four of the ladies in the Beckenham and their neighbourhood requested permission to allow them to give a Tea-drinking (...) at 4 in the afternoon’.[^91] In December 1864 the Board had granted permission to Lady Cramworth to hang up few colour prints and set up a Christmas tree ‘where the old people live’ and ‘a little present to each of the boys and girls’.[^92] By 1870 the Union agreed to accept a donation of ’45 volumes of books (...) for the use of the inmates’.[^93] 

Karen Hobbs, who researched the impact of visiting societies on paupers[^94] found that ‘middle aged women used their domestic expertise as wives and mothers’[^95] to enhance the lives and skills of the female inmates. Supporters such as Lady Cramworth were adding much needed female warmth and patronage. Louisa Twinning and *The Workhouse Visiting Society* fought for workhouse improvements in daily life, but they also pressured the Poor Law administrators to re-examine its confusing attitudes towards female paupers.[^96] Especially concerned with girls, Twinning criticized workhouse schools for

[^90]: BA, Minutes Book 1858-61, 1 September 1859, p.289  
[^91]: Ibid, p.75  
[^92]: BA, Minutes Book 1861-1865, 20 December 1865, p.613  
[^93]: BA Minutes Books 1867-1871, 7 January 1870, p.338  
[^94]: The Implementation of the Poor Law in the Basingstoke Union, North Hampshire, c.1870-1900 (Milton Keynes: The Open University Library online, 2019), p.40  
‘turning out female automatons who could neither run a house nor serve as a domestic’. 97 This demonstrates that volunteers and campaigners such as Twining and Lady Cramworth went beyond delivering basic aid, and had recognised that lack of education, training and mutual contact between classes catches women in lifecycle poverty. By supplying the paupers with books to read, skills to perform domestic chores and tea parties to connect inmates with potential employers, they aimed to provide a support but also stronger impact in reducing women’s long-term destitution. Their hands-on contribution meant that some able-bodied women were able to derail the course of lifecycle poverty, improve their situation and leave the workhouse for good.

Image 3.6 Louisa Twining (1820-1912), a founder of The Workhouse Visiting Society. Twining campaigned for better treatment of workhouse inmates and long-term solutions to female poverty, such as education and training for girls.
Source: Elliott and Fry, Wellcome Collections, 1893

Non able-bodied inmates

In 1878 the Bromley Union and the Local Government Board agreed to build in Farnborough a woodcutting shed, bake house, washing room, kitchen, shoemaker room, and tailor’s shop. This indicates a shift from engaging inmates in tasks such as oakum picking and glass pounding, to giving them more useful jobs, which in turn prepared them for better life outside the workhouse. The Poor Law authorities and the Local Board also tackled some poverty related elements such as access to clean water, better diet and children’s education. For Farnborough women becoming a skilled laundress, needlewoman or cook meant an improved chance of gaining a meaningful employment. However, despite a gradual shift towards tackling the reasons behind poverty, workhouses were getting busier. The number of paupers in most workhouses was growing; sources show that Farnborough expanded from 80 inmates in 1845 to 245 in 1881. The picture in neighbouring workhouses was similar: Bethnal Green increased from 700 inmates in 1851 to 1120 in 1881 and St Luke’s in Chelsea went up from 337 in 1851 to 591 in 1881. One document survived, which sheds a light on the reasons why the poorest stayed in workhouses for long periods of time. It demonstrates direct link between lifecycle poverty and workhouse residency. In 1861 the Poor Law Board published a return of every adult pauper, who had been in the workhouse for a continuous period of five years or more.\(^98\) It also shows the reasons behind their long-term stay. David Englander argues that ‘about a fifth of inmates had lived in the workhouse for upwards of five years’.\(^99\) In Farnborough the total number of paupers living in the workhouse in 1861 is unknown. However, the

\(^98\) The image of the original page of the document for every workhouse is available on www.ancestry.co.uk

\(^99\) David Englander, Poverty and Poor Law Reform in 19th Century Britain, 1834-1914 (London: Routledge, 2013), p.34
government’s long-term residency paper shows that there were twenty-four long-term inmates, ten of them were women, and they resided in the workhouse between five to fifteen years (Table 3.7). The data confirms that those women were either too old or too sick to look after themselves. All ten were also either unmarried or widows, which signifies that they had no fathers or husbands to support them financially.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Time in Farnborough 1861</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria Morris</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>15 years, 2 months</td>
<td>Unmarried, former servant</td>
<td>Age and infirmity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Barnet</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14 years, 9 months</td>
<td>Unmarried, idiot</td>
<td>Idiotic, unable to take care of herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Smith</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14 years, 7 months</td>
<td>Unmarried, idiot</td>
<td>Idiot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Tremain</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>14 years, 2 months</td>
<td>Widow, former servant</td>
<td>Age and infirmity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Humphrey</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>10 years, 7 months</td>
<td>Widow, chairwoman</td>
<td>Age and infirmity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy Humphrey</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>9 years, 7 months</td>
<td>Unmarried, needlewoman</td>
<td>Paralysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betsy Wood</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>6 years, 3 months</td>
<td>Widow, former servant</td>
<td>Scrofula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta Sloper</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>6 years, 2 months</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Age and infirmity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia Swan</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>5 years, 9 months</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Age and infirmity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliza Hough</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>5 years, 8 months</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Ulcerated foot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.7 List of long-term female workhouse inmates, who were in Farnborough for a period of over five years (Ordered by the House of Commons and completed by the Chairman of Bromley Union on 30 July 1861). Chart shows government data combined with additional information (age and marital status) from www.ancestry.co.uk.

The government returns reveal that despite their repeated attempts to discourage women from depending on workhouses, many females remained reliant on Poor Law institutions. Illness and old age meant that with a lack of support from family members and out-door
relief, the poorest female paupers were continuously trapped in destitution. Whereas for young able-bodied girls the addition of new workhouse kitchens or laundry rooms provided a chance to learn a valuable skill and find a job, for the aged and chronically ill women poverty was not a choice in life with a possibility of a positive change, but a lifelong constant struggle for survival.

Conclusion

The changes introduced by the Poor Law commissioners in 1834 meant that many women, who could not depend on financial protection from fathers and husbands, went into workhouses such as Farnborough. This chapter demonstrates that lifecycle poverty continued to affect destitute women even under direct care of the national and local administrators. The workhouse position miles away from the town centre, its strict working rules, unpaid labour, poor food rationing and lack of decent sanitation meant to discourage poverty-stricken women from entering in high numbers. However, many women had no choice. The Bromley Union guardians, who were focused on building maintenance, staffing and vaccinations, were aware of the desperate situation of those who resided in the workhouse. The decisions taken by the guardians reflected contemporary attitudes towards impoverished inmates; the implications of long-term poverty among female paupers did not concern them above their line of duty.

Members of charitable organisations such as Workhouse Visiting Society had demonstrated more understanding of the reasons and consequences behind lifecycle and gender related poverty. Their regular visits and contributions to Farnborough provide evidence of their shared beliefs that more can be done to change the tide of destitution. However, the lack of their influence on the government also indicates that the impact of charities on the poorest inmates was limited and many women reminded reliant on
workhouses. This chapter studies the attitudes of local management and charities; the experience of Farnborough females forms the core of the next chapter.
Chapter 4

Inmates

This chapter gives a voice to female inmates of Farnborough. It analyses case studies to examine the circumstances, which brought women to the workhouse and their experience of the institution. Admission and refusal records give an indication of the conditions in which women arrived at the door. Referrals, emigration approvals, burials and committee records show in what circumstances they left, while workhouse baptisms and disciplinary procedures reveal details of their lives whilst in the workhouse. There are no surviving testimonies from Farnborough women, however some comments noted in the Minutes Books offer a glimpse of the way in which women responded to the management and rules of the workhouse. To build a more comprehensive picture of the inmates, the study also provides a detailed sample of admission records from 1871. Finally, the chapter argues that for some young, healthy and single women the workhouse offered a chance to regain control over their future. However for mothers with dependable children, the sick and elderly inmates, the workhouse offered immediate protection, but in a long-term it did not positively alter the course of their lifecycle of poverty.

Admissions

Admission records from Farnborough workhouse are problematic as surviving documentation is incomplete and unreliable. Some Minutes Books barely list the applicant’s surname, while other admission records are not registered at all. The most precise data comes from 1871 and in order to identify common elements among the candidates for admission, the year is used as a study sample. Table 4.1 below lists the
names of thirty-five women admitted to Farnborough in 1871 according to their age, starting from the youngest to the oldest and stating if they arrived with children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Names of woman admitted to Farnborough workhouse in 1871</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of dependent children admitted with their mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ann Harmen</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Eliza Hourley</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Susan Keely</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Frances Power</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Henrietta Gibson</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a</td>
<td>Lucy Wickenden (admitted twice)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lucy Benton</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mary Ann King</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1 child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9a</td>
<td>Phoebe Mann (admitted twice)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ann Stone</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Emily Merknell</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Sam McDonald</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>My Ann Vallens</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Mary Lover</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1 child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Elizabeth Cafseldon</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Mary Ann Burbridge</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Ann Belcombe</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Mary Ann Puckell</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1 child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Eliza See</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1 child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Eliza Collier</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Ann Gent (admitted five times)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Johanna Mews</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Ann Persons</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Ann Pucknell</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Lucy Hills</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Ellen Croncan</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Ann Klerman</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Elizabeth Cheeseman</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Susan Fuss</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Mary Ellis</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Annie Shebridge</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Hanna Whiffin (admitted twice)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Mary Ruskin</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Lucy Brubridge</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 Women over the age of 16 admitted to the Farnborough workhouse in 1871.

What is immediately apparent from the above admission table is the contrast between women in the age group from 20 to 40 years old and from 40 to 80 years old. In the
younger group almost all women of childbearing age arrived in Farnborough with dependent children. This indicates that their poverty level and reliance on workhouse assistance was linked to motherhood, a period in which women had limited chances of holding a job. In the older group, only three women are in their 40s, while eleven are over the age of sixty. This suggests that once the dependent children left home, women were again more likely to earn their own living. However, as they begun to age and most likely developed health problems, their poverty and dependence on workhouse increased yet again.

Although admissions from 1871 represent a small sample in Farnborough’s history, individual records from other decades (Table 4.2) demonstrate the same pattern, which lead to the same conclusions. Almost all admissions, regardless of the year in which women were admitted, show that motherhood and ageing were the main reasons behind increased female destitution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of record of admission from 1851</th>
<th>Example of record of admission from 1881</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Eaten (age 18) plus 2 children</td>
<td>Susan Lane (18) plus 1 child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Lockger (45) plus 5 children</td>
<td>Julia Champion (34) plus 5 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Lane (45) plus 4 children</td>
<td>Mary Andrews (72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Williams (77)</td>
<td>Sarah East (77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elizabeth Walters (85)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 Examples of admissions into Farnborough indicating that motherhood and aging were important elements in women’s reliance on workhouses

Source: BA Minutes Books 1847-1852 and BA Minutes Books 1880-1881

Table 4.1 (p.42) also shows that out of 35 women admitted in 1871, four were re-admitted in the same year. It indicates that some Farnborough women struggled to support themselves once leaving the workhouse. Among them was Ann Gent, admitted to Farnborough five times in 1871 and admitted around fifteen times between wider period
of 1870 and 1876. Ann was 49-years-old and had no dependent children. However, she came from a very poor family of domestic servants, and she was often re-admitted with her sister Mary (68) and mother Sarah (83). The Guardians commented on Ann’s case as ‘one which occasionally reoccurs in many Unions, and for which unhappily there is no direct remedy’. Ann’s case demonstrates, that poverty affected not only mothers and the elderly, but also single, middle-aged women; and the poor law administrators had no strategy to alter their long-term destitution.

Some admitted women had supportive husbands, yet their income was not enough to provide for the whole family at all times. Sarah Bridger was first admitted to Farnborough with her husband Edward, son David and her illegitimate child William, on 24th October 1845. The 1881 census shows that Sarah, a former domestic servant, is back in Farnborough. She is now 77 years old, a widow and like the Gents, without regular income, and once again she is experiencing an intensified period of poverty.

Gender

Gender also played an important role in lifecycle of poverty. As David Englander points out ‘wives had no autonomous existence but were compelled to follow their husbands’. Pat Thane notes that ‘if a male pauper was officially classified “not able-bodied”, so was his wife, whatever the personal physical condition’. Evidence from Farnborough support Englander’s and Thane’s statements about gendered treatment of workhouse females. Mrs Brugen was refused a request to leave Farnborough, and the decision was only overturned when the Master, Mr Higham was reminded that ‘he had no legal

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100 Both listed as Farnborough inmates on 1881 workhouse census, as well as appearing on admission lists.
101 BA, Minutes Books 1871-74, 31 March 1871, p.113
authority to detain her, her Husband having consented to her leaving’. In similar circumstances Elizabeth Stone ‘was freed by her father’, who argued that she is not insane.

Although this reveals that women who had male protectors were dependent on their decisions, single women had more control over their lives and they sometimes used it to their advantage. To receive guaranteed entry and better food rations Sarah Waller from Chislehurst claimed that she was alone and four months pregnant. When a month later, after examination by Doctor Smith, she was found lying, Sarah was ‘given notice to leave the workhouse’. Similarly, when Mary Ann Purkiss arrived at the workhouse door claiming she is in labour, she was immediately let in, despite not having an admission order and being ‘in a state of intoxication’. The following morning, discovered to be five months pregnant, Ann discharged herself.

A letter of admittance did not guarantee a workhouse place and some women arriving at the door were turned away due to overcrowding. Bromley Police complained to the Guardians that ‘those destitute women have to spend a night at the police station’ and urged the Board to provide more beds. The problem was worse in the winter months as agricultural workers struggled to find employment and the Board received increased number of requests from the whole families. Among many examples are: William Waters with wife and their children, John Edmunds, wife and their six children and William Staples with wife and also six children. Summer months saw fewer admissions, however occasional disasters also had an impact on the level of admissions. When in June...

104 BA, Minutes Book 1858-1861, 3 December 1858, p.4
105 BA, Minutes Books 1852-1855, 25th May 1855, p.477
106 BA, Minutes Books 1847-52, p.307
107 BA, Minutes Books 1876-1878, 18th May 1877, p.222
108 BA, Minutes Books 1867-1871, 5th June 1868, p.82
109 BA, Minutes Book 1847-52, 17th December 1847, p.11
110 BA, Minutes Book 1847-52, 14th January 1848, p.13
1877 Colorado Beetles destroyed all crops of potatoes, it caused a wave of poverty among the locals.\footnote{111 BA, Minutes Book 1876-1878, p.269} The Guardians, advised by the government, were forced to limit outdoor relief to few ‘deserving’ farmers and this in turn, made more women, who were indirectly affected by the disaster, reliant on the workhouse. Karen Hobbs, who analysed admissions to Basingstoke workhouse in Hampshire, concluded that Poor Law officials sought to cut costs by reducing numbers of paupers receiving outdoor relief. This in turn forced Basingstoke widows and deserted wives into the workhouse\footnote{112 'The implementation of the Poor Law in the Basingstoke Union, North Hampshire, c. 1870-1900', in A826 Module Dissertations Examples (Milton Keynes: the Open University, 2019), p.28} and their cases demonstrate difficulties faced specifically by women with children. The evidence points to the conclusion that while few single women had some control over their lives, for the majority of married mothers freedom and financial stability was entirely decided by male prerogatives such as fathers, husbands, Guardians and out-door relief administrators.

\textit{Referrals to asylums}

Most Farnborough referrals to asylums were arranged with the permission of husbands, who claimed that their wives were insane.\footnote{113 BA, Minutes Books 1847-1852, p.507 and p.510} However, the Board did not always agree with families trying to dispose of their relatives. When on 5\textsuperscript{th} of May 1847 one men asked for his wife Rebecca Wilson ‘of weak intellect and unable to take care of herself’\footnote{114 BA, Minutes Book 1847-52, 4\textsuperscript{th} February 1848, p.418} to be sent to asylum, the Board refused, ruling that she is capable of getting a job. Among other reasons for which Farnborough women were transferred to asylums was refusal to obey. Accused of arguing, Charlotte Mills was brought in the front of Bromley guardians nine times (Photo 4.4, p.48). As punishment, each time she had been isolated and given only...
bread and water, until two years later the Board decided to send Charlotte to an asylum.115 Charlotte’s case was not unusual; 16-years-old Emily Sparks was also reproached for ‘using bad language’. Advised by ‘Rev G. L. Langdon who stated that he thought it would be advisable to get her admitted into an asylum’116, the Guardians arranged for Emily’s removal from the workhouse. Mary O’Connell’s case shows that an illness was also used as a reason for referrals to asylums. The clerk noted ‘that medical officer had reported her to be diseased with syphilis, and had left a recommendation signed by Lord Sydney, for her admission into the Lock Hospital’.117 Soon afterwards Mary was transported to Kent County Lunatic Asylum in Maidstone. Inmates sent to asylums lost not only their independence but also whatever remained of their possessions. When Ann Barlett was sent away, the clerk reported that ‘to fund her place there the Board agreed to sell of all her belongings’.118 Although evidence in previous chapter shows that Farnborough guardians did accommodate mentally sick women, the referral records demonstrate that troublesome inmates were promptly removed into other institutions. The Lunatic’s Register119 of workhouse inmates from Bromley Union shows that some women remained in asylums for up to twenty years until their death. Illnesses, such as mental disability and syphilis, were a common reason for referrals, but if the inmates were disobedient, the Guardians also looked for an excuse to imprison them.

115 BA, Minutes Book 1847-52, 4 February 1848, p.418
116 BA, Minutes Book 1858-61, 2 March 1860, p.288
117 BA, Minutes Books 1843-1845, p.29
118 BA, Minutes Book 1858-61, 2 March 1860 and 2 May 1860, p.322
119 BA, Ref GBy/W/C’9
Disciplinary parameters

Despite serious threat of being sent to asylum, workhouse women were not submissive. David Englander observes that ‘women’s wards were noted for their noise and disruption’.\footnote{Poverty and Poor Law in 19th Century Britain, 1834-1914 (London: Routledge, 2013), p.41} Englander points out to an example of Kensington workhouse, in which forty women ‘assaulted the officers and barricaded the ward. The police were called in and they had to break the door open and carry four of the girls to jail’.\footnote{Ibid.} Women in the Farnborough also rebelled against strict rules. The most notorious of them was 17 years old Elizabeth Gregory, who between 1847 and 1853 regularly found herself imprisoned on bread and water. Among her richly documented offences are ‘breaking up 29 square

Photo 4.3 Page listing offences and punishment of Charlotte Mills from the Farnborough Workhouse
Bromley Archive, Minutes Books 1848-1851, Photo: Author’s own
glasses in the Sleeping Ward, hitting the master Mr Higham in his face and refusing to do any work’. 122 Other punishable offences, for which women were sent to solitary confinement, included ‘wearing their hair contrary to the regulations of the house’123 and ‘getting out of window’. 124 Emma McDonald, Elizabeth Percival and Sarah Smith got in trouble for ‘refusing to take their meals in the Dining Hall, and not behaving themselves properly at prayer time’125, while Jane Wilkins was punished ‘for getting through the rail into the garden to steal the peas’.126 A year later, on 1st October 1861 local newspaper *Bromley Record* reported that inmates Sarah Smith and Emma Macdonald refused to do tasks requested by the Master Thomas Lukey. When Lukey threatened to lock them up, Sarah ‘struck and kicked him. The other girl was in the wash-house where there was an attempt at riot, and she threatened to take the master’s life’.127

Although some of the offences sound more like a light-hearted mischief, other cases demonstrate a genuine hardship of women in the workhouse. Despite the Guardians ordering ‘that a door be placed (…) to prevent mothers from getting access to the children’128, Elizabeth Bell, age 36, was reported as ‘having encouraged her boy to get over the wall and gave him bread and butts’.129 Sarah Swindle was also reported for having in her possession two quarters of bread, and ‘on being questioned by the Chairman she admitted that she had given the bread to her children. That the bread had been given to her by some of the inmates’.130 Both women were warned that if they do it again, they will be severely punished, but the aims and suffering of workhouse women is evident from

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122 BA, *Minutes Books: 1847-52*, 17 December 1847 and 20 April 1853
123 BA, *Minutes Book 1858-61*, 29 November 1861, p.27
124 BA, *Minutes Book 1858-61*, 28th January 1859, p.34
125 BA, *Minutes Book 1858-61*, 23 August 1861, p.596
126 BA, *Minutes Book 1858-61*, 20th July 1860, p.364
127 Peter Boreham, *Daily life in Bromley and neighborhood 1858-1900* (Bromley: Published by Peter Boreham, 1999), p.73
129 BA, *Minutes Books 1858-1861*, 4th February 1859, p.42
130 BA, *Minutes Book 1858-61*, 13 September 1861, p.603
other records. One of Sarah’s children, Elizabeth died in the workhouse at the age of thirteen months.\textsuperscript{131}

The stress of maintaining strict regime in the workhouse also affected the staff. Nurse Miss Perkins who was found ‘intoxicated’ and ‘being in an excited state’ was brought in the front of the Board and reprimanded. Luckily for Miss Perkins, her long working hours in difficult conditions were taken into consideration and ‘she was not punished’.\textsuperscript{132}

Furthermore, when another nurse Mrs Porter asked the Guardians for port wine ‘as she finds it necessary for her head’\textsuperscript{133} to do her job, the Board approved her request.

Evidence shows that Farnborough operated with strict disciplinary boundaries, but despite the threat of punishment, there was a sense of kinship between the inmates. Farnborough women remained defiant and protective over their children and each other. Recorded offences such as giving bread to children suggest that poverty continued to affect them in the workhouse, but it also shows that inmates did not accept deprivation with passive compliance but fought for respect and better conditions.

\textit{Lifecycle poverty and the justice system}

Women arriving in Farnborough workhouse were often accompanied by children and deserted by the fathers of their offspring. When possible, the Guardians tried to chase the fathers for payments and reclaim their expenses. Records show that the Board issued warrants: ‘to apprehend Edward Hepburn for deserting his wife and family’\textsuperscript{134} and against William Bryant ‘to take his family out of the workhouse’.\textsuperscript{135} Henry Lewis was also

\begin{footnotes}
\item[131] BA, \textit{Farnborough Burial Records}, p.68, entry 537
\item[132] BA, \textit{Minutes Book 1858-61}, 13 July 1860, p.364
\item[133] BA, \textit{Minutes Book 1858-61}, 4th February 1859, p.43
\item[134] BA, \textit{Minutes Book 1847-1852}, 17th November 1848, p.107
\item[135] BA, \textit{Minutes Book 1847-1852}, 24 November 1848, p.110
\end{footnotes}
‘ordered to pay maintenance ‘until the child was 13-years-old and the costs of the proceedings’.\textsuperscript{136} When the fathers refused, as did John Gilham\textsuperscript{137}, the Board occasionally took them to court\textsuperscript{138} (Photo 4.4).

Photos 4.4 An example of Guardians fighting for financial maintenance of an illegitimate child of Farnborough inmates Elizabeth Wood and baby George John Wood. Source: Bromley Archive Minutes Book 1874-1877, Photo; Author’s own

Whereas it was easier for the Board to chase payments from poor paupers, the situation was more complicated when the accused man was of a higher class. Carolyn A. Conley wrote of a case in which a judge ‘dismissed a case without hearing because he believed it was incredible that the accused, a respectable married father of four, could possibly have

\textsuperscript{136} BA, Minutes Book 1874-1877, 10 March 1876, p.356
\textsuperscript{137} BA, Minutes Book 1874-1877, 7\textsuperscript{th} August 1874, p.13
\textsuperscript{138} BA, Minutes Book 1874-1877, 7\textsuperscript{th} August 1874, p.13
raped a teenage domestic servant'. As Conley explains ‘judges and jurors frequently concluded that no man should lose his respectability, let alone his freedom, for the mere seduction of such unworthy creatures’. In Farnborough, the Guardians demanded payment from Mr Edlmann, noting that ‘under the circumstances under which domestic servant was sent to the Workhouse, the Board (...) believed was morally due by him’. Eventually, to avoid a public scandal, Edlmann decided to pay. In another case the clerk noted a complaint by three women against Union’s medical officer. Mrs Bragier, a widow with three children testified that ‘Mr Fowler poked me twice with his whip in an indecent manner’ adding ‘when I spoke to him he asked me if I knew who I was talking to’. Confronted with the accusations, Dr Fowler denied the accusations. Fowler’s behaviour was never reported and dismissed by the Guardians, because his gentleman’s word was taken as evidence.

The above examples show that marital status, gender, class and respectability were important elements in establishing parental responsibility and had a significant impact on women’s level of poverty. As Sonia Rose points out, men were solely responsible for the economic welfare of families, but the law singled out the poorest women. In cases against men, the law protected respectable married men and women, but it was unusual for the Board to fight for maintenance and justice for illegitimate children and their poor mothers. Unmarried women of lower class often had no chance to win paternal

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140 Ibid, p.95
141 BA, Minutes Book 1871-1874, 2nd July 1871, p.3
142 BA, Minutes Book 1853 ‘Intoxication of Medical Officer Fowler’, 29th July 1853, p.192
143 Ibid.
144 Sonya O. Rose, Gender and class in the nineteenth century England (London: Routledge, 1992), p.54
recognition and financial support for their children, which in turn trapped them in workhouses and lifecycle of poverty.

**Baptism records**

Baptism registers\(^{145}\) show that between years 1845 and 1881, 1105 children were baptised in Farnborough parish. 159 of them (around one in seven) were children of single mothers, listed as ‘base–born’ (a Victorian term for illegitimacy)\(^{146}\) and ‘abode in the workhouse’. In 1862 Bromley Union erected a workhouse Chapel sponsored by public donations. The Chapel (Photo 4.6, p.55), located at the south west of the workhouse, begun regularly baptising workhouse children from 1876.

The Chapel’s **Baptism register**\(^{147}\) shows that in around ninety per cent of entries the child’s father name is not listed, while the space for ‘trade or profession’ is used to point out that the head of the family is a ‘single woman’. Table 4.5 (p.54) also shows that some women had more than one child baptised while in the workhouse. Many women remained single and they kept returning to Farnborough when having another child, sometimes few years apart.

The high number of unmarried mothers, which made 14.4 per cent of all Farnborough parish baptisms, indicates that single motherhood was not an exception, but affected a large group of females in the Victorian society. It also demonstrates that for unmarried pregnant women, who were not financially protected by law and supported by families,

\(^{145}\) BA, Farnborough Parish Baptism Register 1845-1876 on Microfilm, Ref
\(^{147}\) BA Workhouse Baptism Register Folder 1876-1881
the workhouse was a safe place to deliver and baptise their babies. Yet, as all 159 fatherless baptised children resided in the workhouse, the evidence also strongly points to a link between single motherhood and female poverty\textsuperscript{148}.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of single woman residing in the workhouse</th>
<th>Children and years of baptisms</th>
<th>Name of single woman residing in the workhouse</th>
<th>Children and years of baptisms</th>
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<td>Sarah Gregory</td>
<td>William (1860)</td>
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<td>Sarah Emily (1849)</td>
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<td>Henry (1857)</td>
<td>Elizabeth Wood</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Charles (1859)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Richard (1880)</td>
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<td>Mary Swindle</td>
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<td>Lucy Wickington</td>
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<td></td>
<td>John (1878)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mary Ann (1866)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Emma (1864)</td>
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<td>Sarah Ann (1863)</td>
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Table 4.5 Examples of single mothers, who had more than one child baptised while abode in the Farnborough workhouse.
Source: BA Farnborough baptism records, Chart: author’s own

\textsuperscript{148} For full list of 159 baptized children see appendix 2
*IMAGE REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS*

Photo: 4.6  Farnborough Chapel. Built from public donations in 1862 for the sole use of the inmates. It is the only surviving building of the workhouse and as a Breast Cancer Care center (perhaps poignantly) is still used to support women in need.  
Photo: Primrose Breast Cancer Care

![Example of a baptism records from Farnborough’s Chapel.](image)

Photo 4.7  Example of a baptism records from Farnborough’s Chapel. Missing names of the fathers and their profession are marked with dots, while under children’s name there is a comment ‘base-born’, confirming illegitimacy.  
Source: Bromley Archive, Farnborough Parish Baptism Records 1845-1876, Photo: author’s own.

Death and burials

One of the fundamental subjects that deeply worried the poorest in the Victorian society was their dignity after death. As Englander points out ‘to be buried in an unmarked grave without ceremony, expense or dignity was an assault on personal identity and an affront to the most cherished values of class and community’.  

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149 David Englander, p.46
workhouse death records revealed that out of 50 infants 46 were buried unbaptized, the
public was outraged. 150 Bromley’s guardians were likewise aware of public opinion
towards deceased paupers and records show that they took action to maintain their dignity.
The Board complained when the coffins to bury Farnborough inmates were so bad ‘any
tradesman would be ashamed to send it’. 151 After the death of Sarah Mercer the Guardians
complained about the lack of notice of her funeral 152 and when Mr Langton, one of the
 guardians attended the funeral of Mary Vallins, he was alarmed that the broken coffin was
so awful ‘it was opened an inch and half at the foot’. 153 The reasons behind the funeral
problems were the high costs. The Creed Register shows that to avoid paying the fees
many inmates, who were asked for an address of the nearest relative often answered as
having nobody. Burial records in Farnborough’s Dunn Funeral Accounts show that the
average cost of adult funeral in 1860 varied from £4-4s-3d (equivalent to 250 pounds) to
£38-11s-0d (2280 pounds in modern times). 154 The price included anything from elm or
oak coffin, best velvet pall and fittings, ornaments, inscriptions, horses, cars and up to
eight bearers. However workhouse women had none of the above. The cheapest funeral
recorded in Dunns accounts is that of Elizabeth Gregory on 18th March 1860. The fees,
paid by Relieving Officer Mister Wilson amounted to £0-16s-0d, equivalent to forty-seven
pounds today. Records also show that her funeral included just ‘1 foot extra grave and
turfing’. 155 The case studies show that while the Guardians monitored burials of
Farnborough inmates, their allocated finances were well below the national average to
arrange a dignified service; and for workhouse women it meant that poverty affected them
not only in motherhood, widowhood and old age, but was equally visible in their treatment

151 BA, Out letter volume 1845-1858, 25th May 1855, p. 255
152 BA, Minutes Books 1874-1877, 18 February 1876, p. 326
153 BA, Minutes Books 1876-1878, 4th May 1877, p. 21
154 National Archives Currency Convertor
155 BA, Burials and funerals Ref: 668/1/6 Dunns Folder, No.6, Entry 23
after death.

Destinations

Farnborough guardians did not keep systematic records of women who left the workhouse and therefore it is not possible to generate accurate statistics. However some surviving data offer an insight into individual cases, which helps to build a wider picture. Census records available on ancestry websites show that some workhouse women married and set up their own homes, while others kept returning and remained completely dependent on the workhouse. Among those who struggled to maintain a good standard of living was Mrs Beadle. A visiting district Reliving Officer described ‘three badly nourished children at home, in filthy state, covered in head lice and not in a fit condition to be sent to school’. The family was relocated into the workhouse.

Notes from the Visiting Committee and Bromley Emigration Records also provide evidence that healthy women ‘of certain age and under certain restrictions’ were offered relocation to Australia, Canada and United States, while sick patients with illnesses such as rheumatism or scrofula were sent to the Royal Sea Bathing Infirmary at Margate. However young, single women were most likely to work as domestic servants in various English houses. Table 4.8 provide examples of their destinations as well as comments made to the Guardians by the family mistresses, who took them in.

156 BA, Minutes Books 1880-1881, 18th November 1881, p. 32
157 BA, Minutes Books 1847-1852, 7th April 1848, p. 48
158 BA, Minutes Books 11865-67, 21 July 1865, p. 76
Names of inmates | Details or destinations | Notes by the Guardians or comments from the family
---|---|---
Susan Knowlton | Ordered into service by the Guardians on 17th December 1847 | ‘to be allowed to have her shoes repaired (...) and some sufficient clothes given upon her leaving the house to go to service’

Emma Ayres | In 1884 working for Mrs W.C. Smith in Cheswick. | Mrs Smith: ‘Emma left her service’.

Annie Hardy | In 1885 working for Mrs W.C. Smith in Cheswick. | Mrs Smith: ‘A. Hardy is still with us, she is not over bright, but a throughout, willing, honest girl, and we have implicit trust in her’.

Emily Cromwell | In 1885 listed as working for Mrs C.M. Clarke in Wandsworth | Mrs Clarke: ‘Emily left last year, and it was a very untruthful, disobedient and troublesome girl’.

Emma Wisdom | In 1884 listed as working for Mrs Lee in Croydon. | Mrs Lee: ‘Emma Wisdom is still in her employ and is a good girl’.

Alice Gibbons | In 1891 listed as working for Harriet Richards in West Wickham, a widow. | Her sister Annie also joined the same household.

Rachel Thorn | Working as servant at 31 Addison Road, Bromley. | Still in employment in 1885.


Table 4.8 List of former female inmates from Farnborough workhouse working as domestic servants, showing destinations and additional comments noted by the Guardians. The table shows the poverty level and indicates that some women settled well into employment.

Source: Bromley Archive, Committee Minutes of Bromley Union (some records are catalogued in Biography Index). Table: author’s own.

The case studies show that some Farnborough women were successful in holding long-term positions as domestic servants, while others were not capable or perhaps not lucky in finding suitable employments. Those examples also show that single women had more chance to remain in employment after leaving the workhouse, than married women with children such as Mrs Beadle. However, overall evidence points to the conclusion that the majority of women, who left Farnborough did not become visibly richer, but remained in relative poverty, in low paid jobs and dependent on employers, husbands or back in Farnborough under the care of the Guardians.
Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the inmates of Farnborough workhouse. The analysis of admissions, referrals, baptisms and many individual case studies helped to identify the main groups of women who entered the workhouse and the reasons behind their dependency on the institution. The first group were mothers varying from the age of seventeen to forty, who were often single mothers, widowed, abandoned by their husbands or had husbands, whose wages were not enough to support the whole families. The second group of workhouse women were mostly the aged or sick, over the age of sixty, who could no longer to support themselves financially, and whose families would not or could not care for them. In both groups it is evident that destitution changed the patterns of family relations and it affected all aspects of their lives, from independence, education, employment, to health, and even treatment after death. The chapter also established that whereas Farnborough provided a temporary home for the most fragile women and the guardians occasionally fought for the maintenance of children, the workhouse was not set-up to help them in the long-term and outside the institution. Consequently for many women, especially mothers and the elderly, it meant returning into repeated cycles of poverty.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

The dissertation aimed to demonstrate a link between female poverty and life changing circumstances such as marriage, pregnancies, ageing, widowhood and illness, events that ultimately forced many destitute women to seek help in workhouses. As a case study, it set out to examine the treatment of adult female inmates admitted to Farnborough workhouse in Bromley. The dissertation focused on the first four decades of Queen Victoria’s reign, however it is possible to continue the research of poor laws and their impact on Bromley residents beyond 1881. As the Victorian era came to an end with the monarch’s death in 1901, intellectuals in Britain begun to understand that it was not the laziness of the able-bodied paupers, but lifecycle factors such as motherhood and ageing that were the main reasons that fuelled female destitution. In response to the growing pressure from social reformers and the public, the government began setting up pension schemes and less-stigmatising forms of welfare reforms such as free school meals for the poorest children (1906), first pensions for over 70-years-old, Lunacy Act (both in 1908) and a state sickness and unemployment insurance schemes (both in 1911). This led to the replacement of the Poor Laws with the Ministry of Health (1930), which brought to an end a century of Chadwick’s welfare policies and the eventual closure of the last workhouses.

Taking into account the political and social changes between 1881 and 1930, further research should explain the changes in Farnborough workhouse. Simultaneously it should investigate what happened to the poorest, yet healthy inmates of both sexes, and how changing approach to lifecycle poverty impacted their lives. The Bromley Archive holds a vast collection of primary sources, which would allow investigating other subjects linked
to Farnborough, for example, the difficulties facing children who were born, raised, educated and trained in the workhouse. The archive also holds sources relating to Bromley Union’s out-door relief policies allowing to investigate the financial side of the poor laws. In a field of gender and lifecycle poverty a study of lunacy, migrations, adoptions, and fostering of Farnborough inmates is also possible from the large amount of unstudied records. Equally engaging and important would be a research of training grounds, businesses, a school and infirmary as well as agricultural lands and gardens, which were developed to benefit Farnborough inmates. The study of the above additional factors should contribute towards better understanding of workhouses and enhance our knowledge of lifecycle and gender-related Victorian poverty in southeast England.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this dissertation. In terms of national historiography Chapter Two has shown that the changes introduced by the Poor Law Amendment Acts in 1834 were focused on reducing outdoor relief to able-bodied healthy paupers, however the acts did not address the needs of women who did not fit into the criteria. The commissioners remained uncertain as to whether the primary role of the poor women was work or home. The findings of the chapter strongly suggest that this situation trapped women between contradictory expectations; and if for any reason they could not earn an income, destitute women became reliant on workhouses.

Chapter Three aimed to shift the focus from the attitude of national lawmakers to the response of local authorities towards the poorest women under their care. It analysed evidence from the Bromley Union Minutes Books, local newspapers and parliamentary records to verify the approach of the guardians towards the inmates of Farnborough. The findings of this chapter suggest that while the guardians were focused on daily issues such as building maintenance, vaccinations and food rationing, the implications of long-term
destitution among female paupers did not concern them above their line of duty. What also emerges in this chapter is that charitable organisations had demonstrated better understanding of the reasons behind lifecycle poverty, however their influence on the government was limited and consequently many women reminded dependent on the workhouse.

Chapter Four analysed the evidence gathered from case studies of Farnborough inmates. The findings confirm previous suggestions that the most destitute women were often pregnant, single young girls who had no skills and supportive families, the abandoned wives with young dependable children, and the aged widows. In almost all cases the absence of a male breadwinner and outdoor relief pushed women deeper into pauperism and admission to Farnborough.

In all three key chapters the study has shown that social, political and lifecycle factors played a significant role in women’s destitution, however the gender elements were equally important. Victorian women had restricted freedom of movement, inadequate control over their bodies, possessions as well as access to education, job market, healthcare, judicial system and state-funded welfare. They lived in male dominated society, in which fathers, spouses, guardians, medical officers, and even church officials took decisions on their behalf. Whereas wealthier Victorian women had more choice, the most destitute female paupers remained entirely dependent on their families, and if that was not possible, on local unions and their workhouses.

Each individual case from Farnborough records revealed a personal battle, but also wider human cost of state legalisations, which were not properly assessed in terms of gender related consequences. The House of Commons discussion of the dietary crisis put Farnborough on a national stage and highlighted the problem of food deficiency in
workhouses. Although it did not revolutionise the system, Farnborough’s case led to small positive changes. Farnborough revealed that despite hard living conditions, fear of rejection, humiliation or severe punishment, the poorest women showed determination to look after their children and survive throughout the hardest periods of their lives. If there is a final conclusion about Farnborough women, it is that their experience of destitution was not entirely unique. Parallel reasons and consequences behind lifecycle and gender related poverty exist in many other periods of English history, outside the workhouse walls and the beyond the periods of old and new Poor Law acts.
Appendices

Appendix A

Map of Farnborough Workhouse showing the main buildings, separate male, female, imbecile ward, children wards, the Chapel and additional buildings for fire engine and wood cutting. Although the map is not dated, the inclusion of the Chapel indicates that the map was drawn in the second half the nineteenth century.
Source: Bromley Archive

*IMAGE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS*
Appendix B

Data relating to Chapter 3.
Image: List of sixteen parishes, which were part of Bromley Union.
Source: Bromley Archive Minutes Book 1843-1847

*IMAGE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS*
Appendix C

Data relating to Chapter 4
Baptism records from Farnborough Parish of 159 children born to unmarried workhouse women, listed from 1845 until 1881.
Source: Microfilm and Workhouse Baptism Book at Bromley Archive.

Page 1/2

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<th>Baby’s name</th>
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