

A329-22J The Making of Welsh History

Student Dissertation

**‘Women, drink and sin’:
Female philanthropy in
Victorian and Edwardian Llandudno.**

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Introduction

Whether you were middle-class, working-class or a pauper, female life in Victorian and Edwardian England and Wales was fraught with limitations and difficulties. This study will consider how the women of Llandudno's middle classes contributed to charitable work in order to improve the lives of the poor, especially female paupers faced with problems around alcohol and sexual impropriety. In doing so, it will illustrate not only their intelligence, ingenuity and work ethic, but also how they responded to the prejudices and motivations current at the time. The middle classes saw drink as the cause of all social evil. The following chapters will discuss how philanthropy in Llandudno tackled the increased alcohol abuse by women. The related problems of immorality and the fallen woman had to be addressed in order to uplift and civilise these women and, as will be shown, Llandudno's female middle class rose to the challenge.

The genteel Victorian seaside resort of Llandudno was a comparatively small town by English standards.¹ In 1858, the arrival of the Chester and Holyhead railway ensured tourism became an indispensable part of the local economy.² The resulting diversity of trades, cultural amenities and tourist entertainments meant it became known as the '*Queen of Welsh Resorts*', frequented by the '*petit bourgeoisie* and the middle and upper-middle classes'.³ With many of its permanent residents being from England and with new holiday-makers from 'the better-paid artisan classes'⁴, the 'dominant ambience' of the town became recognizably English.⁵ But while Llandudno may have been the epitome of burgeoning middle-class respectability and urban structure, as will be shown problems of poverty, drink and immorality were never far from the surface of the resort's veneer of respectability.

Previously, where existing Welsh historiography has concentrated on towns, it has mainly focused on a wider set of agendas such as religion, class, politics and the environment,⁶ although Julie

¹ Total populations: 1831- 622, 1841 – 1047, 1851 – 1131, 1861 – 2316, 1871 - 3082, 1881 – 4193, 1891 – 6065, 1901 – 7282. Parry (2002), p.126.

² p.125

³ Ibid., pp, 138, 143.

⁴ Ibid., p.125

⁵ Borsay (2008), p.116.

⁶ Ibid., p.100

Light has explored the personalities and motivations of elected local government officials.⁷ Consequently, her work is restricted to considering elite men and ignores any female contribution to the community. Peter Shapely, whilst specifically considering the Mancunian urban environment, discussed the subject of philanthropy and how those entering the ‘charity field’ expressed notions of Christian care and benevolence. Thus, civic leaders became ‘morally upstanding members of the community’ and he concluded that ‘charitable work served to underpin membership of a middle-class elite’.⁸ Like Light, he did not consider how female philanthropy allowed women an expression of their agency through their social usefulness and by establishing their social position.⁹

Brian Harrison did consider the characteristics and motivations of Victorian philanthropists. However, he dedicated only a meagre couple of paragraphs to women, writing dismissively:

Deprived of alternative outlets for their literary and organisational talents, and possibly for their emotions too, Victorian women could derive from philanthropy all the excitement and dangers of penetrating and observing the unknown while at the same time securing the change of scene and activity which is the essence of recreation’¹⁰

This implies that, from his perspective, Victorian women saw charitable work as a source of recreation and not a serious pastime. In contrast to this view, Moira Martin considered how middle-class women of Bristol carved out civic identities for themselves through philanthropic work and consequently become recognized within their local society. The limited opportunities available to women to engage in public roles has been considered by Seth Koven, who noted that these were generally restricted to social welfare and voluntary associations.¹¹ Even so, it is estimated that in 1893, half a million women were actively involved in philanthropy and, as Jane Lewis has argued, though their numbers were small their effect and influence on social policy was particularly significant at a local level.¹² Lewis’s work on British female social reformers such as Octavia Hill and Beatrice Webb considers how these ladies believed that, through social work,

⁷ Light (2005), pp. 88-99.

⁸ Shapely (1998), pp.157–177.

⁹ Martin (2008), pp. 395–417

¹⁰ Harrison (1966), p. 360.

¹¹ Seth Koven, ‘Borderlands: women’s voluntary action’, quoted in Martin (2008), p.398.

¹² Jane Lewis, ‘Gender, the Family and Women’s Agency’, p. 40, quoted in Martin (2008), p. 398.

they could have a civilising influence on, and change the mind-set of, the poor. However, despite these studies there is a lack of research into charity work and the influence of middle-class ladies within North Welsh towns, when compared to existing studies based on South Wales industrial towns and ports.¹³

This dissertation will therefore focus on Llandudno's middle-class female philanthropists between 1880 and 1914. From the April 1891 census, Gwenfair Parry has determined that there were a total of 1070 households in the town, of which 216 consisted of married couples with children. As Parry also established, a high proportion of the residents and householders were non-indigenous English speakers¹⁴ and the community reflected a broad range of ages and marital status.¹⁵ Therefore, Llandudno provides a microcosm in which to study the method and effect of female philanthropy during this period. As will be shown, the town's civic personalities exhibited contemporary ideas and prejudices surrounding class, poverty and gender roles.

Contemporary reports and articles published by the local newspaper, the 'Llandudno Advertiser and List of Visitors', were written anonymously or submitted by the honourable secretaries of the associations or societies. As noted by Shapely on the Manchester press, sometimes these articles tended to eulogise those involved in charitable work.¹⁶ However, they also tend to be detailed in reporting what was said by whom and the responses, thus allowing an insight into the opinions, grievances and motivations of those present. These show that numerous charitable societies and committees were formed, all fundamentally concerned with the welfare and betterment of a specific sector of the community.¹⁷

Within this study, the different types of philanthropy will be divided between work to assist the 'deserving' poor and workhouse paupers. Chapter One will look at ways in which middle-class

¹³ The rapid development of towns like Methryr Tydfil and ports such as Cardiff and Swansea have been described as frontier towns by historians such as Andy Croll – dens of iniquity where immorality and vice ran riot. This compares to the rather more genteel resorts along the north coast of Wales such as Llandudno and Conwy.

¹⁴ Parry (2002), p.143.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Shapely (1998), p. 157.

¹⁷ The names of those committee attending are listed in most reports. For examples see the annual meeting report of Llandudno Charity Association, *Llandudno Advertiser and List of visitors*, 16th November 1907, p. 3.

women volunteered for charity work and engaged with schemes to assist the poor of Llandudno. Its investigations into the nature of these women's contributions are based on contemporary newspaper reports and articles. Chapter Two will look at paupers and, in particular, women who had illegitimate children and the reactions to their predicament. It will address the need for women to act as Poor Law Guardians and why they were considered to be of benefit within these institutions. One such instance was Miss Susan Edith Champneys and her charitable contributions to Llandudno, in particular a speech she made as a Guardian of the Conway Union, which will be considered in detail. While a large part of the evidence contained within this chapter are taken from local newspaper reports, some also come from the Westminster Review, the Royal Commission on the Feeble-Minded and articles by campaigners such as Louisa Twinings.

Chapter One

Faith, Hope and Charity

In the late Victorian era, philanthropy was one area in which male and female elites could contribute equally to society. Women were able to work alongside their male counterparts, even though, in keeping with strong gender segregation of roles, women were limited to more maternalistic work.¹⁸ Julie Light considered how personality and public persona were crucial to the civic leadership ambitions of the male middle classes.¹⁹ This suggests a degree of altruism, given the self-interest of these businessmen and professionals in the success of their communities and businesses. However, her discussion fails to recognise the strong ethos for social work that was an accepted part of middle-class behaviour, irrespective of gender. Both men and women found they could achieve recognition and respect from their peers by undertaking projects for the betterment of their community. Some took a humbler approach to their charitable work, such as Dr James Nicol J.P. who, having been described as ‘putting his hands to the plough for the public and permanent benefit’ of the residents of Llandudno, replied;

*“I have tried everything, in conjunction with others, to do what I can to promote welfare and the prosperity of the town...It never occurred to me that I did more than my simple duty.”*²⁰

For Victorian moralists and religious evangelists, the role of a respectable woman as the perfect wife and mother was centred in the home. Their celebration of domesticity and female dependence clashed with the very notion of women working.²¹ The synergy between charity and religion is illustrated by the Right Rev. Prellit, who stated that the aims and principles of Llandudno’s new Cottage Hospital would ‘claim sympathy and active support from every Christian mind’. Furthermore, he affirmed that those ‘who God in his providence has blessed with means’ have an opportunity to alleviate the sufferings of those who are less fortunate.²² However, for middle-class women who sought to lead more ‘useful lives’, there was a moral conflict between this domestic

¹⁸ Maternalism is considered by Theda Skocpol as ‘the unique feminine value system based on nurturance and care’ and ‘women activists who sought to [extend] the moral values and social caring of the home into the larger community’, quoted in Zylan (2000), pp. 608–629.

¹⁹ Light, Julie (2005), pp. 88-99.

²⁰ *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 17th February 1884, p. 3.

²¹ Clark (2000), p.268.

²² ‘Opening of the Llandudno Cottage Hospital’, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 2nd July 1881.

sphere and their strong sense of Christian duty.²³ In order to keep on the side of respectability, they had to walk a fine line between violating the norms of womanly behaviour and their public activities.

Women such as Louisa Twinings (1820–1912) and Susan Edith Champneys (1863-1928), managed to tread this path successfully. Louisa Twinings was a trail-blazing campaigner and philanthropist principally concerned with the treatment of female paupers and reforming workhouses. She became recognised as an expert in this field before serving as a Poor Law Guardian from 1884-1890 in London and 1893-1896 in Tunbridge Wells.²⁴ She strongly believed that middle-class women had a natural aptitude for voluntary work and that they should not only be permitted but actively encouraged by society to become involved. Sensitive to the ideals of a paternalistic society, she utilised the ‘rhetoric of domesticity’ in order to create and justify female public roles that were acceptable to her male contemporaries. She was particularly concerned with stimulating a new breed of educated middle-class women, who no longer had to perform ‘household drudgery’, and could therefore engage with charity work.²⁵

One such lady was Susan Edith Champneys who lived at Epperston, Abbey Street, Llandudno. The 1911 census showed she was a spinster of independent means who therefore had the leisure time to dedicate to philanthropy. Like the women investigated by Martin and Lewis, her actions demonstrate her desire to civilise and uplift the poor, in particular female paupers. She first appeared in the Llandudno press in 1883, being noted for her assistance during the preparations for St Luke’s Day on October 18th.²⁶ This suggests that she had connections with Llandudno which could account for her eventual settlement there after her father, the Rev. Maximillian Hugh Champneys, died in 1891. In 1899, she began to appear regularly in local newspaper articles and it is apparent that she had become an established member of the town’s volunteering contingent. Apparently, she was a force to be reckoned with, being described as having ‘an unflagging interest and never-failing zeal’ for her work with the Sarah Nicol Memorial Cottage Hospital.²⁷ These

²³ Jones (1992), p. 338.

²⁴ Grenier (2004), ‘Twining, Louisa (1820–1912), philanthropist’. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

²⁵ Twinings, Louisa (1858), p. 31.

²⁶ *North Wales Chronicle*, 3rd November 1883, p. 3.

²⁷ *Llandudno Advertiser and List of Visitors*, 14th March 1902.

characteristics were also clearly displayed in her work relating to unmarried mothers, as discussed in Chapter Two.

There were a number of married and unmarried ladies of Llandudno's middle class who were regularly involved in local charitable work. An absence of social welfare, beyond that provided by the workhouse, meant most of their work revolved around welfare or health charities. Harrison maintains that fundraising was considered a feminine speciality, as they could show an audacity and tenacity which, if coming from men, would have caused offence.²⁸ The ladies on the Board of Management of the Cottage Hospital seemed particularly talented in this sphere, raising considerable funds. One of their roles was to organise the very successful annual 'Hospital Saturday Collection'. The district was divided into three areas, each with a team of ladies who manned collection stations on the streets and also went round the hotels and boarding houses to pick up their collection tins.²⁹ Other fund-raising efforts included entertainments such as a Chrysanthemum Show organised by Mrs John Walker, a member of the Board, and her husband which raised £71 10s³⁰. This talent for fundraising was also demonstrated by the committee of the Llandudno & District Nursing Association which consisted mainly of women, with Lady Augusta Mostyn as President and Edith Champneys serving on the committee. This committee was responsible for managing the 'sick fund', which provided practical necessities to poor patients. This fund required financing which was achieved through promotional publicity and fundraising appeals organised by the very capable female committee members.³¹

Whilst adept at fundraising, these ladies also were responsible for organising the day-to-day operations of facilities such as the Llandudno Sanatorium and Convalescent Home for Women, a local charity run by women for women 'who, through severe illness or the constraints of work, are unable to continue to discharge their duties'.³² The Sanatorium was certainly of local benefit and efficiently run as in 1896, 176 female patients were successfully treated and returned to the

²⁸ Harrison (1966), p. 360.

²⁹ The catchment district was divided into three areas which were assigned as follows: Conway – Miss Dalton, Degamey – Mrs Willoughby Gardner and Llandudno Junction – Mrs Nevitt and Family. *Llandudno Advertiser and List of Visitors*, 20th January 1906,

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 11th March 1905.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 12th October 1900.

³² *Ibid.*, 16th January 1892, p.2.

work force.³³ Another charity, the Llandudno Cottage Hospital was established in early 1881 due to the combined efforts of both ladies and gentlemen.³⁴ The charity provided an early form of health insurance, being funded by subscriptions. Each guinea bought one person up to 4 weeks' free treatment a year and there was no limitation as to who you could nominate for treatment, with the exception of paupers³⁵. Whilst the medical care was provided gratis by the town's Doctors, the daily administration was left to the Lady Superintendent and her volunteer team of female assistants. The charity was so successful that the ladies' workload outgrew the original eight female members of the Board of Management, which was increased to eleven in January 1904.

These three charities - the Cottage Hospital, the Nursing Association and the Sanatorium - all prove that Llandudno's middle-class ladies were not fragile angels in the house, but hard working, educated and capable people who exhibited competency in marketing and organisational skills. They had the financial acumen and dedication to run successful enterprises, despite the limitations placed on them by the paternalistic society they inhabited.

These women did not work in isolation from their male counterparts and it was not uncommon to see husbands and wives active in the same associations or societies but in different capacities, such as Dr Edward and Mrs Mary Gooddey, Mr and Mrs T. T. Marks, and Dr and Mrs Bold Williams, to name but a few. One couple in particular was held in very high regard. Dr James and Mrs Sarah Nicol. Sarah Nicol had been instrumental in the founding of the Cottage hospital. After her death in February 1884, it was dedicated to her memory, becoming the Sarah Nicol Memorial Cottage Hospital. This illustrates the affection and respect in which she was held by the town and was recognition of her philanthropic achievements. Alongside her, Dr James Nicol found time to be actively involved in social work which was also greatly appreciated. In 1884, a public testimonial to him raised £400, which he generously donated to purchase and build a ward at the Cottage Hospital. In 1902, this new wing was named 'the James Nicol' at a public ceremony. According to the Llandudno Advertiser, this was proof that his memory, and that of his late wife, would be for ever synonymous with their unqualified desire to help 'suffering humanity'.³⁶ This

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *North Wales Express*, 20th February 1881.

³⁵ History Points (website), available at: <https://historypoints.org/index.php?pge=site-of-llandudno-cottage-hospital>.

³⁶ *Llandudno Advertiser and List of Visitors*, 13th March 1902.

couple, who were just one of a number who appear regularly in the newspaper reports, show that, in the realm of philanthropy in Llandudno, men and women could work together with equal status with each gender excelling in their own sphere.

Meanwhile, after resigning as Honorary Secretary of the Sarah Nicol Memorial Cottage Hospital, Edith Champneys did not hang up her collecting tin. In November 1903, she was instrumental in the formation of, and became the Honorary Secretary *pro tempore* of, the Llandudno Charity Association (LCA).³⁷ From a later speech given by Rev. Llewellyn R. Hughes, it is apparent that, in the winter of 1903-4, poverty and unemployment were causing such an intense problem for Llandudno that the ‘representative people’ of the town realised something had to be done to render assistance to the poor.³⁸ The charitable association that was subsequently formed had one simple aim: ‘to help those not paupers and to try to prevent them becoming paupers’. Paupers were considered a breed apart, who were to be kept separate from the ‘tidier’ classes. This meant that if they were sick ‘the workhouse infirmary was the proper place’ for them, and not one of the charity hospitals in the town.³⁹ Thus, the objectives of the LCA provide a clear indication of contemporary attitudes regarding those who were considered worthy of charity and those who weren’t and also suggests that there was a perceived hierarchy between differing levels of poverty. Clearly not all men were considered equal. This prejudice was confirmed in 1898 by Mr Bircham, who argued for a system of classification of poor and paupers in order to ‘separate the sheep from the goats’.⁴⁰ This confirms that whilst many of Llandudno’s philanthropists wished to dedicate their efforts towards helping their fellow man, both genders harboured prejudices against the most disadvantaged in their society.

By 1905, the LCA was acknowledged as a ‘boon and blessing to the town’, despite there being higher numbers of poor than usual. This raised concerns that the LCA was creating a ‘class of professionally poor’ who were dependant of charity to survive.⁴¹ These cautionary words echoed those of the Right Rev. Prellit who expressed disappointment that charitable work had been abused in the past.⁴² This had also been noted in 1882 by Dr Nicol, who acknowledged that it could be

³⁷ Ibid., 27th November 1903, p. 6.

³⁸ Ibid., 16th November 1907, p. 3.

³⁹ *The North Wales Express*, 8th October 1886.

⁴⁰ *Llandudno Advertiser and List of Visitors*, 13th April 1898.

⁴¹ Ibid., 11th November 1905, p. 8.

⁴² *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 2nd July 1881.

difficult to discriminate 'between the worthy and undeserving objects of charity.'⁴³ These comments indicate that the middle classes were aware that some unscrupulous individuals, who were not classed as paupers, were not averse to taking advantage of their charitable generosity and therefore they needed to be careful whom they assisted.

This trait was displayed in 1909 when bad weather resulted in those claiming relief, who were classed as too old or weakened by illness, were unable to work outside. The LCA had subsequently started a covered wood-yard to provide alternative employment. This was found to be an 'excellent test of the genuineness' by Mrs Marks, the Honorary Secretary, advising that when they had to work for their relief, a number of these applicants 'simply faded away'.⁴⁴ The subsequent laughter that was reported to have occurred at this observation suggests a degree of cynicism amongst the committee members. However, it also highlights differences between the social classes; for some working-class men, a free benefit handout was more appealing than working their way out of financial trouble, which contradicted the highly regarded middle-class ideals of self-sufficiency, self-respect and independence.

The LCA also actively campaigned against mendicity cluttering the streets of Llandudno, making it clear that local professional beggars needed to be exposed and stopped. Interestingly the Chairman of the LCA argued that those who donated were partially responsible as they perpetuated an 'abuse of charity by indiscriminately giving to persistent beggars'.⁴⁵ However, as many of the beggars were the neglected children of alcoholics, and therefore begging in order to buy food, the LCA sensibly tackled this problem directly by providing free meals to these children so that they didn't need to beg on the streets.⁴⁶

Run entirely by women, the Free Meals for Children committee was formed in 1905. They organised twenty occasions during the winter months where they served lunch at the Cocoa House for up to 160 carefully selected children at a time. These meals were anecdotally reported to

⁴³ Ibid., 1st July 1882.

⁴⁴ *Llandudno Advertiser and List of Visitors*, 16th November 1909, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 11th November 1905, p. 8.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 16th November 1907, p. 3.

improve the children's attention at school and therefore their education.⁴⁷ However, it wasn't just children these female volunteers helped, as they contributed significantly to running the Thrift Department. This was effectively an early form of savings club for the poor, with the town being divided into districts, each being visited weekly by the same female collectors.⁴⁸ The annual reports show the year-on-year success of this scheme as more working-class people appreciated the benefits of being able to rely on savings during the tough winter months.⁴⁹ This success indicates that the ladies of the Thrift Department were extremely competent in their roles, gaining the trust of the lower classes and allaying their scepticism around the benefits of the scheme, as well as managing the funds and organising the repayments each January.

Brian Harrison has speculated that middle-class ladies enjoyed a sense of danger in visiting the poorer districts and interacting with the working classes. However, based on reports of their involvement, the ladies of Llandudno appear not to have acted purely for their own entertainment and excitement. An advantage of the personalised Thrift Department collections was that they enabled the ladies to build a rapport with the families they visited every week, thereby gaining their trust. Consequently, they were able to recognise signs of potential distress or hardship they witnessed and report them to the LCA's Agent, who was then able to respond in a pre-emptive manner.⁵⁰ This recognition of embryonic problems has the appearance of a rudimentary mentoring system by the middle-class ladies, reflecting a sensitivity towards the difficulties faced by the families in their individual collection areas. This empathy was also demonstrated in 1900 when the LDNA reported the appointment of a 'Queen Victoria Jubilee' trained nurse who, it was proudly reported, was bilingual in Welsh and English. This shows an appreciation in the Llandudno district that in order to provide effective treatment, communication needed to be in a language understood by the patient.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ibid., 6th November 1909, p. 2.

⁴⁸ The districts were: Council Street - Mrs Rowlands, Cwllach Street - Mrs J.D.Owen, Old Road District - Miss R W Jephcott, Jubilee Street, Madoc St, Chapel St - Miss Price, Back Madoc Street - Miss Arkle, Alexander Rd & King's Rd - Miss G Mather, Clifton Rd - Miss Watterson; see *ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Parry (2002), pp. 135-6.

Whilst the empathy shown by the LCA's volunteers did not extend to paupers, some of the volunteers, such as Edith Champneys, served on the Poor Law Boards of Guardians. This area of female philanthropy had developed in the late Victorian period as a direct result of campaigners such as Lousia Twinings. Writing in 1885, C.A. Biggs promoted the benefits of women working as Guardians, arguing that the existing management of these institutions was often by uneducated, dishonest and incompetent members of 'Bumbledon', as the more cultivated and competent gentlemen were occupied elsewhere.⁵² What was needed was a fresh injection of 'persons of education and refinement' with knowledge, good sense and sufficient leisure time to dedicate to the day-to-day running of a workhouse. Therefore Biggs, echoing Twinings, proposed that middle-class women were the obvious answer and succinctly argued that the work was just domestic economy on a larger scale, stating 'enlarge a household and it becomes a workhouse'.⁵³

Matilda Blake, writing on the same subject, advised that, on 1st Jan 1891, of the 780,457 people receiving relief in England and Wales, four fifths were women & children i.e. 624,364. For Blake, this high proportion of women meant that female Guardians were essential. By 1893, 136 women Guardians had been elected in England and Wales, despite the issue of qualification which excluded a great number of eminently suitable candidates who were not householders.⁵⁴ Male guardians were seen as unsympathetic and ignorant when it came to certain areas of women's health and care such as confinement.⁵⁵ The presence of a lady Guardian was believed to temper the humiliation and embarrassment for women appearing before all male Boards of Guardians, by providing support and understanding from a female perspective. This was especially necessary in the distressing cases of pregnant girls and women. Blake advised that some all-male boards greeted them with offensive or crude jokes and the presence of a lady Guardian stifled these.⁵⁶ Consequently, as lady Guardian numbers increased there was a shift in responsibilities for these women away from male Guardians and for their cases to be dealt entirely by female Guardians.⁵⁷ How this developed in the Conway Union and the work of female Guardians in relation to women paupers, in particular those effected by drink and pregnancy, and the views of these lady Guardians towards them, is considered further in the next chapter.

⁵² Biggs (1885), p. 387.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Blake (1893), p. 15.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.19.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Biggs (1895), p. 391.

Chapter Two

Women, Drink and ‘Heinous’ Sin

Llandudno was one of fifteen parishes within the Conway Poor Law Union, which finally opened its new workhouse in September 1859. The first female Guardian, Mrs Cotton of Penmaenmawr, was elected in 1898 and it is apparent that this caused some consternation amongst the Board. The chairman, Rev. W. Venables Williams, opened his address saying he ‘felt embarrassed’ as he now had to dispense with the usual formula of greeting and say ‘Lady and Gentlemen’.⁵⁸ It is unclear what his normal mode of address was or why he should feel embarrassed by having a lady present. Perhaps this implies that Blake was correct in that the atmosphere in the previous Board of Management meetings had been raucously masculine and there was some disappointment at the change. Mrs Cotton was undeterred by this misogynistic attitude and appears to have been an active and fearless Guardian.⁵⁹

Within the Conway Union, the contribution of Lady Guardians began to be appreciated and of the thirty-two Guardians present at the 1904 Annual Meeting, five were women: Mrs Oldman, Edith Champneys, Mesdames Lloyd, Brook and Cotton.⁶⁰ Subsequently, the influence of women Guardians strengthened and their opinions appear to have been respected by their male counterparts in relation to their areas of expertise. However, they still faced gender prejudices as evidenced in 1907 when the Chairman argued with Mrs Oldham for a new higher chair as ‘this front row of pretty heads and faces prevents me from seeing other pretty faced behind’.⁶¹ By today’s standards this attitude is unacceptable but the comment does provide us with an insight into the tribulations these women faced.

In 1906, Champneys presented an article entitled ‘Young Mothers in Workhouses’ at the North Wales Poor Law Conference and the North Wales Express deemed this speech worthy of reporting in full.⁶² The language used by Champneys herself and the discussions that followed provide an

⁵⁸ *Llandudno Advertiser and List of Visitors*, 12th May 1898, p. 3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 13th April 1899, p. 3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 10th June 1904.

⁶¹ *North Wales Weekly News*, 19th May 1907, p. 10.

⁶² *North Wales Express*, Friday September 7th, p. 6. Transcribed and attached as Appendix 1.

interesting insight into the rather shocking mind-set of those who were in a position to dictate and control the lives of workhouse inmates. Champneys considered that there were three categories of women and children to be helped: the feeble-minded, the irreclaimable and those who might be helped.⁶³ The Royal Commission on the Feeble-Minded, published two years after this conference, defined this term as someone who was mentally defective and stated:

*At large in the population are many mentally defective persons, adults, young persons, and children, who are in some way, some in another, incapable of self-control, and who are therefore exposed to constant moral danger to themselves, and become the source of lasting injury to the community.*⁶⁴

The use of ‘feeble-minded’ and ‘imbecile’ by Champneys and her colleagues appears to apply specifically to unmarried women and girls with a defective moral compass, who were generally unable to control their sexual behaviour. The blame for this illicit behaviour was planted fairly on the shoulders of the women involved, although Champneys refers to these ‘feeble-minded’ women as ‘easy prey to any cowardly scoundrel’,⁶⁵ perhaps indicating some sympathy for their predicament. The only other Guardian to consider both sides of the argument was Mr T J Lloyd, who commented that sexual activity wasn’t just the woman’s fault and that it was ‘astounding that men were so inhuman’ as to take advantage of, and effectively wreck, these girls’ lives. This apparent sympathy aside, Lloyd illustrates the contradiction between charitable views verses Christian morality by later labelling them as a ‘pest on the country’. They were considered a burden on, and a danger to, society, with contemporaries believing that they ought to be permanently restrained in order to prevent further procreation. In reflecting this view, Champneys displayed a darker side of her character when she declared:

*Personally, I agree with those Guardians who strongly advocate that women who have lost all self-control, become so completely depraved and demoralised as to be a danger to and a burden on the community, should have their liberty taken from them’.*⁶⁶

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Dickinson (1909), pp. 238–252.

⁶⁵ *North Wales Express*, Friday September 7th, p. 6. See Appendix 1.

⁶⁶ Ibid. See Appendix 1.

She suggested that these women should be detained under a special medical certificate, an action she hoped the forthcoming Royal Commission would recommend as currently ‘this sin is not criminal’.⁶⁷ From the discussions that followed, it becomes apparent that Champneys’s point of view was representative of other Guardians present at the conference. Miss Walton Evans (Local Government Inspector of ‘Boarding Out’) had strong opinions on feeble-minded girls, arguing that they should be kept permanently institutionalised, with their children taken away and educated in special schools. Mr Harding Roberts stated that if a woman entered the workhouse more than once for confinement, she should be detained permanently as it was obvious that these women, whom he referred to as ‘imbeciles’, were incapable of taking care of themselves. Mr Prince suggested that the workhouse was not the right place for ‘that class of people’ and that a new type of establishment should be created for the detention of these ‘imbeciles’. The newspaper report clearly shows that most of these comments were greeted with cheering and approval.

Admittedly, all present were juggling the daily provision of relief against the resultant costs to ratepayers, so the problem of unmarried mothers and their children must have been a constant pressure on resources. However, the above opinions, whilst abhorrent to us today, were typical of those held by the higher classes, as confirmed by the Royal Commission in 1908:

*...when it is borne in mind how many young women, who have already had illegitimate children....it will be recognised what grave risk there is, in both sexes, of a further propagation of their defect.*⁶⁸

This was a period which saw a rise of the ‘science of eugenics’ initially instigated by Francis Galton. Subsequently, Sybil Gatto founded the Eugenics Education Society in 1907. This society was concerned with ‘curing’ a variety of social and physical disorders or traits among the poor, including alcoholism, habitual criminality, reliance on welfare, prostitution, neurological disorders such as epilepsy, mental conditions such as insanity and ‘feeble-mindedness’.⁶⁹

The 1834 Poor Law commission report had painted unmarried mothers as scheming seductresses who entrapped young men into paying for their children. In an effort to stop the resulting

⁶⁷ Ibid. See Appendix 1.

⁶⁸ Dickinson (1909), p. 52.

⁶⁹ Blue Plaque Stories (website), *Eugenics in Britain*, English Heritage, Accessed 22/4/23.

illegitimacy, the bastardy clauses made unmarried mothers totally responsible for their children, so they either had to work, which was impracticable with the issues of childcare and low pay, or enter the workhouse.⁷⁰ Whilst presenting the following statistics on illegitimate children, Champneys talked about the ‘state of immorality in this Christian country of ours’. It is perhaps not surprising that Champneys as a vicar’s daughter reflected contemporary religious attitudes on the sanctity of marriage when she attacked the problem of illegitimacy, calling it a ‘dark stain of impurity’ that needed to be eradicated. Considering the depth of the issue, she presented the following statistics for the whole of England and Wales.⁷¹

Year	Population of England & Wales	Illegitimate Births
1880	25,714,288	48 per thousand (= 1,234,286 children)
1890	28,763,673	44 per thousand (= 1,265,600 children)
1900	32,249,187	40 per thousand (= 1,289,967 children)

She showed that, despite the increase in the overall population, the numbers of illegitimate children born as a proportion of the overall population was rising at a slower rate. However, the issue Champneys brought before the Conference was that this reduction was not reflected in North Wales, suggesting a higher degree of immorality within the Principality. For the period between 1893 and 1903, the rate of children born out of wedlock in their area was disproportionately high at 62 per thousand. The unusually high illegitimate birth rate in North Wales was confirmed in December 1906 by Mrs Herbert Lewis, the wife of the MP for Flintshire, who supplied the current figures obtained from her husband in London:

South Wales	30 births per thousand
North Wales	60 births per thousand ⁷²

This was not something that the North Wales philanthropic classes were proud of, as these figures illustrated the waywardness of their ‘fallen women’ - this, despite the fact that, during the previous three years, there were only 118 illegitimate births in the whole Conway Union district,⁷³ equating to only one or two per thousand of the population. Following the conference, it was agreed to

⁷⁰ Clark (2000), p. 267.

⁷¹ See Appendix 1.

⁷² *North Wales Times*, 15th December 1906.

⁷³ See Appendix 1.

establish a voluntary association to undertake rescue work for young women in North Wales.⁷⁴ . The new Association's aims were 'prevention, the rescue of fallen women and the care for friendless girls found in workhouses and elsewhere'. Once more the ladies of Llandudno engaged wholeheartedly with this new scheme and Champneys became the Honorary Secretary of the North Wales Association for the Aid of Friendless Girls.⁷⁵

An article written by Champneys and Mrs Catherine Batters entitled 'Immorality in North Wales' advised that there were 45 illegitimate births in 1913 across the twelve North Wales unions compared to the previous average of 39 per annum, which indicated that they believed local immorality was on the increase.⁷⁶ The Association's volunteers hoped to help these girls elevate themselves and rebuild their lives by finding them employment in service. This however, came at a terrible cost for each rescued mother, as her baby was taken away and re-homed with foster parents. Considered a benefit as 'the child is rescued from pauperism and properly cared for in healthier conditions', it must have been emotionally traumatic.⁷⁷ Whilst it is possible to look back and accept that their motives were entirely charitable, this must be tempered by Champneys's comments that doing so benefitted the ratepayer, suggesting an economic motivation underneath the charitable veneer.

However, the care and education of pauper children was an area of particular concern in both England and Wales. Biggs wrote that 'if pauperism is ever to be diminished or eradicated...[it will be] through giving a healthier education to the Children'.⁷⁸ This sentiment is echoed by Blake who argues that the 'diminution of pauperism' depended on raising and educating children away from the stifling and corrupting workhouse environment.⁷⁹ Biggs quotes one lady Guardian as saying that, when they find intelligent girls in the work-houses, they remove them as quickly as possible before they become 'tainted by evil associations'.⁸⁰ He also includes arguments for extracting girls from the workhouse, suggesting that to further their education and development

⁷⁴ *North Wales Times*, 15th December 1906,

⁷⁵ *North Wales Weekly News*, 6th Annual report of the north Wales Association for the Aid of Friendless Girls, 25th June 1914, p. 9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Champneys and Batters, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Biggs (1885), p. 389.

⁷⁹ Blake (1893), p. 17.

⁸⁰ Biggs (see n. 79), p. 390.

there should be places such cottage homes, where they could be mentored by intelligent and sympathetic women.⁸¹

In 1899, after attending the Poor Law Conference at Bangor, Mrs Cotton reported back to the committee that it was now recognised that orphans and children whose parents came into the workhouse should be boarded out as soon as possible. This required families to take children and Mrs Cotton reported that Conway was being left behind in this regard, as other the Boards were already involved in this practice, paying 4s a week to respectable families who re-homed a child.⁸² Like Blake and Biggs, Champneys contends that unless ‘feeble-minded’ or easily corruptible children received special instruction in proper educational institutions they will inevitably fall into crime and begging, eventually returning to the workhouse to become a burden to rate payers.⁸³ So while the workhouse was seen as no place for children, in early twentieth century Llandudno the apparent concern for the child is seemingly tainted by the overarching concern of economics. Champneys proposed that workhouse girls should be given appropriate training for a year before going into service at around fourteen years old, meaning they would be eminently more employable and could therefore command higher wages.⁸⁴ This motion was defeated 11 to 8 specifically due to the increased cost to ratepayers. This vote illustrates once again the conflict that needed to be negotiated by philanthropists, namely hard economics versus Christian care and benevolence.

Whilst some pauper women were considered redeemable, some were beyond redemption and the rising illegitimacy rates appear to correlate with the increase in female alcoholism along the north Wales coastline. The demon drink was considered responsible for a loss of inhibitions resulting in pre-marital sex and in Victorian Nonconformist Wales, the responsibility for preventing this ‘heinous sin’ was squarely placed on women’s shoulders.⁸⁵ Ian Pritchard has argued that the Victorian elite perpetuated ideologies concerning the physical and psychological vulnerability of females, who were seen as ‘too irresponsible and morally fragile’ to engage with a narcotic

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² *Llandudno Advertiser and List of Visitors*, 13th April 1899, p. 3.

⁸³ See Appendix 1.

⁸⁴ Trained girls could earn £8 per annum as opposed to 19s 6d. *Llandudno Advertiser and List of Visitors*, 13th January 1899, p. 3.

⁸⁵ Pritchard (2012), pp. 326–345.

stimulant.⁸⁶ Thus, drinking was seen as unsuitable for respectable women and abstinence, together with sexual propriety, came to be seen as definitive middle-class behaviour.⁸⁷

However, the increasing prevalence of women inebriates was a specific problem for Llandudno. In 1898 Mr Bircham, the Local Government Board Inspector, warned that the increase in watering places along the coast was directly responsible for the rising number of female alcoholics admitted to the workhouse.⁸⁸ Each week the papers contained articles titled 'The Inebriates List', the 'Wet List' or the 'Black List' for serial offenders and these regularly included women.⁸⁹ Furthermore, Mr Bircham indicated that women alcoholics were unkempt and unclean and needed to be kept separate from the 'tidier class of women'.⁹⁰

This issue of female drinkers appears to have continued to grow. In 1902, Mrs J Herbert Lewis at a meeting of the Llandudno's Women's Temperance Association dwelt on the 'growing evils of intemperance' and argued that the rise in drinking amongst women meant that other women needed to do something to 'arrest this terrible evil'.⁹¹ Not surprisingly, the concern over public drunkenness amongst Llandudno's lower classes resulted in the formation of a number of temperance societies aimed at promoting abstinence. Rather than being a philanthropic mission, Harrison has rather unchivalrously suggested that, for ladies with leisure time, redeeming the intemperate could be considered as effective an escape from boredom or invalidism as actually drinking alcohol.⁹²

However, Llandudno's middle-class society was heavily influenced by religion and the idea of Christian charity. Thus in 1882, when a branch of the Church of England Temperance Society was established, it was not surprising when the Rev. J H Acheson, Rector of St Oswald's, Chester mooted the following propositions:

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 326.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 336.

⁸⁸ *Llandudno Advertiser and List of Visitors*, 13th April 1898.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 15th August 1908.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 13th April 1898.

⁹¹ Ibid., 5th December 1902, p. 2.

⁹² Harrison (1966), p. 360.

- 1) where sin and vice predominated it was necessary for special organisations, such as this new society, to suppress the same,
- 2) the society should be a religious organisation as it was only by religion that they ‘could strike at the root of intemperance’

Faith was therefore at the heart of temperance motivations and provided a strong unifying presence in the community. When North Wales enjoyed a religious revival in the 1905, many were inspired to join church communities and apparently reduced their enjoyment of alcohol too. In 1907 the Church Temperance Guild reported that ‘the enemy was knocked back by the Revival but is now renewing his work’, following a recent rise in public drunkenness.⁹³

The risks to children caused by alcoholism were of particular concern to members of Llandudno’s elite. The Rev. Llewellyn Hughes of the Church Temperance Guild used the phrase ‘the great principle of sobriety’ and preached that, with the ‘dangers of life’ increasing, the young were particularly vulnerable so it was crucial to start them off in the right way.⁹⁴ The Conway Petty Sessions of 1900 prove that these concerns were genuine, as three cases of child neglect were heard on the same day. John Roberts and Ann Griffiths, both regular drinkers, were imprisoned after it was found that their two children were ill-clad, ill-fed, dirty and neglected to such a degree that their health had already been impaired. In another case, a drunk Mrs Ann Jones had to be fetched to the court from home by a policeman before being found guilty, along with her husband, of neglecting their children. Finally, Sarah Hankey was imprisoned a second time for neglect and, when sending her children to the workhouse, the Chairman advised her to leave them there as they would be better cared for and educated.⁹⁵

In order to tackle this neglect, there was a local branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (SPCC). Mr H R Summers praised the local ladies’ committee for their excellent fundraising work within the local community, thus proving that there must have been enormous local support for their work even amongst those who had only a little to donate.⁹⁶ Whilst the main gist of the SPCC’s approach was to protect children from wilful and ignorant mistreatment by

⁹³ *Llandudno Advertiser and List of Visitors*, 30th November 1907, p. 8.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5th December 1902, p. 3.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6th April 1900, p. 7.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 12th December 1908, p. 8.

their parents, Dr E S Goody maintained that this cruelty was usually unintentional and a result of alcoholic parents spending their wages on drink.⁹⁷ Whether intentional or not, this cruelty was a direct result of alcohol addiction and demonstrates that alcohol was a distinct social evil in Welsh resorts and not just in Carmarthenshire.⁹⁸

Champneys and her fellow philanthropists were specifically concerned with the combined issues of alcohol and immorality. Russell Davies has discussed unwanted pregnancy and has established that ‘it was the rural areas of Wales which experienced the highest levels of illegitimacy’.⁹⁹ The figures for North Wales presented by Champneys certainly bear witness to his arguments. There appears to have been a correlation between this and increased female drunkenness. However, there also was a high level of domestic consumption, leading to child cruelty, neglect and increased mendicity. These problems resulted in an increase in the number of female and child admissions to the workhouse and consequently there was a change to the Boards as more female Guardians were elected. Against this backdrop, the ladies of Llandudno worked hard to rescue and re-educate as many girls and young women as humanly possible.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12th December 1908, p. 8.

⁹⁸ Davies (2012), pp. 343–345.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

Conclusion

Llandudno was not unusual in its issues surrounding poverty, nor were the solutions it adopted unique. These were influenced by the moral and religious ideals that abounded throughout Britain at that time and were tailored responses based on the experiences of the local middle classes. Many charitable committees were made up of both men and women, although the sectors they worked in were usually separated along gender lines. Women assumed more maternalistic roles within welfare and health and used their leisure time to constructively help those less fortunate than themselves. Andy Croll has cautioned against projecting middle-class notions of respectability on to the poor themselves¹⁰⁰ and therefore it is necessary to bear in mind that this dissertation makes no reference to the responses of the beneficiaries of these charitable works. However, unemployment was high, living conditions sub-standard and winters tough. It is therefore highly likely that, in Llandudno, the efforts of these middle-class ladies benefited those towards whom their energies were directed.

The advantages of having female philanthropists, especially when dealing with poor, inebriate or pauper women, have already been considered. Using newspaper reports, it has been shown that, in many aspects of their work, these women exhibited intelligence and organisational abilities on a par with those of their male colleagues. They became respected members of their communities and consequently, like the elite men considered by Julie Light, were held in high regard for the work they performed. In contrast to Harrison's theory that implied a degree of frivolity in middle-class women, these ladies appear to have been able to interact and build relationships with the poorer members of their community and to have been sympathetic to their plight.

It is also clear that they were extremely resourceful fundraisers and managed to amass considerable sums each year to support their various charities as well as the Cottage Hospital. For those working as poor law Guardians, the sights they saw may well have been shocking at times and considerably removed from their privileged lifestyles, yet they did not shrink from this work;

¹⁰⁰ Croll (1992), p. 29.

on the contrary, they appear to have relished the challenge. All this supports Jane Lewis's argument that the influence of a small number of middle-class women would have had a significant effect as regards the practical albeit local response to poverty.

The middle-class ladies of Llandudno endeavoured to make a difference to the lives of the local poor, whether by helping them save for hard times, providing much needed relief or through health treatment and rehabilitation. Without their work, one might conjecture that the poor and their neglected children would have suffered much more, especially during the winter months. In addition, for the women and young girls unfortunate enough to find themselves in the workhouse, the help and guidance of female Guardians has been shown to have made a life-changing difference, some being uplifted from pauperism, educated and subsequently able to find employment in service.

Edith Champneys conformed to the ideal of a middle-class philanthropist as promoted by Twinings, Biggs and Blake as being eminently suitable for charity work. Working alongside her contemporaries, she has provided a unique insight into the attitudes of these women. They shared many of the virtues and prejudices of their time: for example, a firm belief in moral values and the importance of Christian charity, coupled with a certain disdain or even lack of sympathy for those unwilling or unable to help themselves. While we may find some of these attitudes uncomfortable by today's standards, they were not uncommon amongst the middle classes. Llandudno, as a microcosm of British society, is likely to have encapsulated these attitudes. It has proved to be a uniquely interesting case study, affording an opportunity to investigate several topics largely neglected in the existing literature. These include the conflict between altruistic and economic considerations and, above all, the role played by resolute, intelligent women in the organisations to which they contributed. Based partly on overlooked or little-known evidence, this dissertation bears enduring witness to their commitment and idealism.

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APPENDIX

TRANSCRIPT FROM *NORTH WALES EXPRESS*, Friday September 7, 1906, p. 6.

NORTH WALES POOR LAW CONFERENCE

Annual conference comprising the six counties of North Wales and was held in Carnarvon over two days.

‘Young Mothers in Workhouses’

By Miss Edith Champneys, Guardian, Conway Union.

It has been said that Poor Law Guardians are left with the failures and laggards on their hands, those who are suffering from other people’s sins and follies, and those who are not wanted in the world. The community hands them to us and says “Take them and do what you can with them: we trust them to you: we have not the time to look after them ourselves: we will give you the money that is necessary for their maintenance, only don’t let them cost too much, as it is all we can do to make our own way in the world.”

So, the responsibility is ours. Much of the material seems very hopeless, but, as Guardians, we have two things on our side – time and money – in which to refit the failures and develop the individual. Surely, we have the hope of returning many to the community, to no longer be a tax upon it, but who shall contribute their fair share to the general good. Let us remember about our work as Guardians that it either allows those committed to our care to deteriorate and multiply, or improves them according to the methods we employ in dealing with them, and all here will agree that where improvement is possible, it is the better alternative and one to be striven for.

The three heads to be briefly considered in this paper, and afterwards to be discussed with some practical results are: Firstly, the feeble-minded women and children; Secondly, the irreclaimable; thirdly, those who might be helped.

It is very necessary that boards of Guardians should be aware of how many feeble-minded children they have on their books, receiving out-door relief or boarded out. The Medical Officers and the Relieving officers should be instructed to bring such cases especially before the Guardians, who should request the Educational Authorities to send these children to proper institutions, to be kept permanently. The present system, or rather the want of it, that is shown with dealing with the feeble-minded children, whether in the workhouse or in respect of outdoor relief, is very much to be deplored. As individuals, too, we ought to bring before the Educational Authorities all feeble-minded children, who are not receiving special instruction, as every one of these children, unless looked after, means so many more on the rates later on. Think of the hard fate of so many uncared for feeble-minded children; follow a few individual cases – will it not invariably be with sad result? You will easily trace them to our gaols and refuges, or you can find many on the streets in our large towns, unable to protect themselves, and without protectors. Why should they still be allowed to go out into the world uncared for? When a feeble-minded girl has drifted into our maternity wards, as is so often the case, an easy prey to any cowardly scoundrel, should we not urge the detention of this class under special medical certificate? Let us hope the Royal Commission on the feeble-minded will advocate this.

Before considering the other two classes, I would earnestly plead that the Guardians should have RESCUE WORKERS in every workhouse, who will care for the cases individually. Think how low the standard of life is amongst women who have come into Workhouses. They have practically no idea of responsibility, their moral training has probably been almost nil, and all know what great want of control there is amongst children now-a-days. Look at the overcrowded sleeping accommodation in many homes. How can we expect our young people to turn out decently when they have not been brought up in decent sleeping accommodation? You say, this paper is dealing with Workhouses, and what has sleeping accommodation to do with this question? It is all intermingled, and one cannot help speaking of the reason why they ever come in. Guardians, as District Councillors, have so much to do with the housing question. Could they not often use their power more than they do in condemning the indecent overcrowding and the insanitary state of some of the houses in their

district? Do we consider it half enough, or does it strike us at all, when out-door relief is given, that it is our duty to inquire and personally gain knowledge as to whether any of these cases are living under overcrowded conditions?

Now to my point. Going through our list of inmates, every House-Committee day, so we realise when a young mother and baby have gone out, that we have hardly seen the girl, made a few inquiries into her story, hardly ever spoken to her or done the least thing to influence her? Do many Boards of Guardians take sufficient trouble to father of the child, and show that they will not allow the rates to be used to support the child when there is a father who can be made to accept his responsibility.

In small Unions we could easily do more to help our girls. Could not the Chairman of each Board, at least, specially bring the possibilities of such work before lady Guardians, asking each one in turn to do something for the girls in her own district, and enquire into their histories, &c. In the big Unions, a Magdalen Society should be started, responsible to the Guardians for their work.

The women can be divided into two classes – firstly those who do not wish to be helped: secondly, those to whom a helping hand and good advice may make all the difference, as it will spur them on to self-control, self-respect, and effort.

The first I name are sad to think of but before we condemn anyone, ascertain if she ever HAD A GOOD CHANCE. Think of her, in the first case, going out to earn her living again, her character lost, her respectable friends, not always, but generally, having given her up. Who will take her as a servant? How can she live if it costs her entire wages – probably 4s or 5s a week – to pay for her child's keep? Where does she get enough money to summon the father, and issue a warrant against him when he fails to pay? Personally, I agree with those Guardians who strongly advocate that women who have lost all self-control, become so completely depraved and demoralised as to be a danger to and a burden upon the community, should have their liberty taken from them. Unfortunately, at present the law does not look upon this sin as criminal.

Now for the second class - those who wished to be helped. Here comes in plenty of scope for rescue work. Much help can be given by officials. Some people think what we really want is a sufficient number of Homes for young girls, to which Guardians, after due consideration, could send suitable cases, at a cost of so much per head per week – the cost not to exceed that of maintenance in the Workhouse – the rate-payers would therefore only be paying for the case to be maintained in an institution other than the Workhouse. In the Homes special training would be given, and individual interest be taken in each case.

Do not think that I wish all cases to be sent to Homes instead of the Workhouse – sin is not to be made easier – but the local workers could in some first and hopeful cases specially recommend the Guardians to consider this individual case. Until this can be done, let us resolve to do all that lies in our power. Personal influence – great tact and firmness – is required, and then, though there would be many disappointments, yet there would be many helped permanently.

The following figures give some idea of the STATE OF IMMORALITY in this Christian country of ours: - In the year 1880, the entire population of England and Wales was 25,714,288, and the illegitimate births registered were 48 per thousand. Ten years later the population had increased to 28,763,673 and the illegitimate births were 44 per thousand. Six years ago, in 1900 the population has risen to 32,249,187 and the illegitimate births registered were 40 per thousand.

Considering the increase of the population the improvement is greatly marked, but does it not give rise to a very serious point – to be considered by the church and other religious bodies – what is amiss with their teaching on this point?

Look at these figures in another way. In North Wales alone the illegitimate births registered for the ten years from 1893 to 1903 are 62 per thousand as against 40 per thousand for the whole of England and Wales. Take the figures again and treat them in a very local manner. For the last three years the number of illegitimate births registered in the various parishes in the Union of Conway is 118. The population of that Union is 34005.

Do we realise the facts these figures reveal: awful facts, surely enough to stir us all to consider how we can each one of use do something to remove the dark stain of impurity from our land. I believe there is no Rescue Home in the whole of North Wales. If one result of this conference could be that some of those present should realise how greatly some of this kind of work is needed, would it not be a most probable way of reducing the statistics in years to come, and helping those at present uncared for and seldom helped.

The immorality amongst such a large number of DOMESTIC SERVANTS is a startling fact. Why should this be? Is it not the feeling of absolute loneliness and want of sympathy that often causes a servant's downfall? Not so much the want of money, as want of a friend? It may sound old-fashioned to say it, but mistresses can and should take greater care of their young servants as regards their free time and evenings out. Such things can easily be controlled or forbidden.

When a young servant dismisses herself from the Union, could not the power of detention be given if she cannot show the Guardians, she has a home ready? Or, if such cases must be allowed to leave entirely unprovided for, would not more connection between the Guardians and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children be a great advantage, and save many a sad story often revealed later in the police court? If "prevention is better than cure", I must add a plea for preventative work. Do we, as Guardians, allow much or any preventative work in our Workhouses? There are great purity societies, let us encourage them to help us. I will briefly mention one, namely, the GIRL'S FRIENDLY SOCIETY and I am glad to say an Associate of this society is allowed, by kind permission of the Guardians, to visit Conway Workhouse and have a class for the children; but I fancy we might take more advantage of the work of this society.

At the present time ladies are working in 447 Workhouses, and last year 5,535 workhouse children were brought under their influence. This society does not in any way interfere with the Poor Law Officials, but works with them for the good of the girls in their charge. It is in a position to do this, for it has a well thought-out organisation, which endeavours not only to look after girls in this country, but to watch over them if they emigrate, and keep in touch with them wherever they are. The one great object of the society, with which every Christian must surely agree, is "to bind women and girls together for mutual help, sympathy, and prayer, to encourage purity of life, dutifulness to parents, faithfulness to employers, temperance, and thrift." If this aim were carried out fully, many a young women would be saved from contact with workhouse inmates at any time, as we should find few people comparatively on the rates if it were not for impurity, temperance and thriftlessness.

DISCUSSION

Following the paper Miss Walton Evans (Local Government Board Inspector of 'Boarding Out') contented that Guardians had no right to send feeble-minded girls out to service, because they were certain to return to the workhouse and be a burden on the rates. More rescue work could be done in North Wales than was at present carried out. They ought either to have the power to keep imbeciles permanently in workhouses or the state ought to establish homes for them (cheers). Special guard should be kept over these people. They ought also to have special schools for imbecile children (cheers). Also, they ought to have a ladies committee dealing with rescue work in connection with each union (cheers).

Mr T.J. Lloyd, Llanrug (Carnarvon Union) said it was astounding that men were so inhuman as to take advantage of feeble-minded girls, and wreck their lives. Yet, that was the deplorable fact. He earnestly hoped that this conference would be the means of infusing more spirit and inspiration in them to do their work as Guardians. He believed ladies were showing a good example to them in this connection (cheers). Imbecile girls and women should not be allowed to go from the workhouses. They, in Carnarvon, were dealing with cases of this nature nearly in every meeting. It had become a pest on the country, and something should be done at once to end the present state of things (cheers).

Mrs Battens said that rescue work was carried on in the Conway Union by ladies. They ought to have a ladies committee in connection with every Board of Guardians in North Wales. The mem members did not go into the maternity ward at the workhouses, and consequently could not follow the cases. They had several lady members on the Conway Union, and they did their best to uplift the moral tone and life of the country (cheers).

She also suggested that the different Unions of North Wales could be grouped together for the purpose of rescue work.

Mr W M Roberts (Carnarvon Union) concurred with the remarks of Mrs Batten.

NEXT DAY – WEDNESDAY

Discussions continued

Mr P. Harding Roberts (Secretary) said that Guardians ought to have ample powers to detention. Yet this was a difficult question to deal with. The British nation had always been noted for its love of freedom, and consequently, this matter was a delicate one. But he believed they ought, as Guardians, to have more powers of detention in extreme cases (cheers). If a girl came into the workhouse a second time in a case of confinement, then she ought to be placed under special control (cheers). It was evident that the person in question was not able to control herself, and therefore someone else should control her. There are women who are incapable of taking care of themselves, in other words, imbeciles. They ought to go to the root of the matter viz., over-crowding. They ought to urge upon local authorities the necessity of having better housing accommodation for the people and to demolish insanitary dwellings. If they want a better generation of people, they must pay more attention to cleanliness in the people's habitations (cheers).

Mr Petrie (Holywell Union) said they ought to have ladies on every board of Guardians in North Wales. He was surprised to hear that there was not one lady guardian in the Carnarvon Union. It was quite different in other unions. He hoped the Carnarvon Union would soon rectify that error (cheers). He also advocated the establishment of Rescue Homes in the district.

Mrs Elias (Valley) said that they had many sad cases of this nature to deal with at the Valley Union. They had girls coming into the house for confinement for the second and third time. They certainly ought to have the power of detention with such cases.

Mr Prince (Holywell) said detention was an important matter. He thought that the medical officer might 'stretch a point' in regard to the detention of imbeciles in the workhouses. But after all the workhouse was not the place for that class of people. He was in favour of an establishment something between the workhouse and asylum for detention of imbeciles (cheers). Epileptics, too, might be detained in such institutions. [...]

Mr Henry Parry, Glan'rafon (Carnarvon Union) said this class of people (the unfortunates) lived in Carnarvon Union and it was high time to put a stop to the practice (cheers).

Mr J.R Hughes (Carnarvon Union) said he quite agreed that they must remove the cause of evil to begin with, viz., over-crowding. He understood there was a Royal Commission now sitting dealing with the lunacy and imbecile question. He did not think any legislation could be suggested on the matter until they had received that Commission's report.

Mrs Darbishire, Carnarvon, who was warmly received, said they had a society to take care of friendless girls in Carnarvon. But they could not compel girls to leave town, and very often when it was arranged to send a girl from Carnarvon into service, she might turn back at the railway station and say 'No I will not leave Carnarvon'. They had a delicate matter to deal with. There was an excellent Rescue Home in Chester and it was a pity they had no Rescue Homes in North Wales (Cheers) [...].