



Living in the Victorian Workhouse

Comprehension Questions

1. In 1601, a poor law was implemented. What did it require?

2. What was 'outdoor relief'?

3. What had happened to the cost of caring for the poor between 1803 and 1818? Why?

4. What act was passed in 1834? What did this law say?

5. Give two ways in which the new workhouses were like prisons.



6. Name two things that children might expect to do in a workhouse.

7. What did the investigation into the Andover workhouse discover?

8. What was picking oakum?



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Comprehension Questions - Answers

1. In 1601, a poor law was implemented. What did it require?

That ratepayers pay for the aid to the poor within the local parish. Ratepayers were those who owned or maintained property in the area.

2. What was 'outdoor relief'?

This was the sending of fuel (coal or wood) and food to the homes of the poor, trying to help them maintain their own homes.

3. What had happened to the cost of caring for the poor between 1803 and 1818? Why?

The cost doubled within a very short period of time. This was due to the large numbers of people moving from farming communities to the cities as the land they usually farmed was enclosed by landowners. There were the developments of the Industrial Revolution and a spike in population.

4. What act was passed in 1834? What did this law say?

The New Poor Law or Poor Law Amendment Act was passed in 1834. The act made it illegal to be poor and destitute and demanded that anyone finding themselves in this position should turn themselves into the police and thus be given a place in a workhouse.

5. Give two ways in which the new workhouses were like prisons.

Answers may vary as there were several things mentioned. Answers might include: those living in them were called 'inmates', there were strict rules about living inside the workhouse, the residents were expected to work for nothing, a scratchy and uncomfortable uniform was given to the residents, the families were segregated (men, women and children put in separate sections) and personal effects were removed on entry.

6. Name two things that children might expect to do in a workhouse.

Children could expect to be separated, at least some of the time from their families (mothers could see children under 7), children would attend school (up to 3 hours a day), children might work or be sent out to be apprentices. The girls would learn to sew, housekeep and cook and the boys would learn a trade or gardening skills.

7. What did the investigation into the Andover workhouse discover?

That the workhouse residents were reduced to eating the marrow from rotting bones for food. The inmates were starving.

8. What was picking oakum?

This meant picking apart old ropes from ships which had been treated with tar. It hurt the fingers and was a slow, repetitive work.