

# Workhouse



There was a workhouse to accommodate 200 inmates in Stacksteads, situated at Mitchell Feild Nook. On New Years Eve 1864 the inmates were treated to a dinner of Roast Beet, and mutton followed by plum pudding. Each child received an orange and to every adult who smoked a 1/2 oz of tobacco and a clean pipe. Non-smokers received tea or snuff. A rise in inmate numbers, together with continuing pressure from the Poor Law Board, led to the erection in 1868-9 of the new workhouse at Pikelaw.

The workhouse was opened in 1870 situated high on the West side of the valley anyone using the main roads from Bacup to Rawtenstall would be able to see it. The boardroom, the porter's room, and relief rooms were erected on the north side of the house, the infirmary situated on the south side, The house itself stood back in the quadrangle, the fourth part of which was made up of grass plots, the space between the boundary wall and carriage drive being planted with trees and well grassed.

The main entrance to the workhouse was by a flight of stone steps which led into the entrance hall. It is said the walls were painted and decorated with pictures. A few steps led into the main corridor, which ran the full length of the building, the different rooms for the inmates leading off on each, side. A similar corridor divided the bedrooms on the second floor. Another corridor branched off and this was where the master and matron's private room, the kitchen, and the, dining hall, were situated.

The workhouse and its inmates often made the pages of the Bacup Times, in 1869 a report appeared with the headline Haslingden Workhouse conditions horrific. The article read: The present condition is revolting. We have heard of nothing more horribly revolting. Even the fever patients cannot, in every instance be allowed a bed to themselves, and in the general wards they are lying as many as three or four to a bed. In 1886 A story emerged Reading, It

is proposed to shunt off the bodies of dead paupers from Haslingden Workhouse to the shambles at Oxford University. This ought to send a thrill of horror through the community of Rossendale. Why should they be denied the rites of Christian, burial and sent to be insulted and cut up like the carcass of a dead pig.

**Edited from an article that appeared in the Bacup Times January 31st 1903.**

Through The Workhouse Visit To Pikelaw By Hurdles Wood Sorting Fibres For Beds Descending a short stairway we find ourselves in a square cellar where was stacked a large heap of fibres. Seated on forms were a number of men engaged in the picking of this fibre, which is used for making beds, our guide informed us that the fibre made very good beds in every way light and springy. This occupation was very suggestive of oakum picking in gaols but was a much more easy and pleasant task.

From the main bulk each man gets a small quantity, which he gently pulls apart letting it fall from his hands in a loose heap on the floor and it is so light and fleecy that small particles rise like a cloud of dust in the room. One would imagine it could hardly fail to affect the lungs of those who have to work with it.

**The Great Hall**

From the cellar we passed up a few steps and thereby came to the large dining hall. In this hall are held those concerts and parties which help so much to brighten the lives of the inmates. At one end of the hall stands the pulpit from which the spiritual advisor of the inmates utters each Sunday words of hope and comfort. Hung on the wall, to the left of the pulpit in broad frames, are three remarkably good original crayon drawings by Mr Brown, of past chairmen of the Board of Guardians. The names of these gentlemen portrayed so faithfully are Mr Joseph Crowther of Bacup, Mr James Kenyon, of Accrington and the late James Lambert vice-chairman.

**The Cook House**

Passing through the great hall the main building crossed a small open space and went into the cookhouse. Here the principal meals of the inmates are prepared. There are at times over 300 inmates. With great bricked up ovens on one side and on the other, deep wide, well-polished pans, heated by steam. Standing near to the ovens is a good-sized potatoes steamer and opposite to this and packed neatly upon one another are the utensils in which potato pies are cooked. The inmate's dinners I give a few examples of dinners prepared here with quantities to each inmate for the week.

Sunday: Roast Beef and potatoes four and half ounces for men and four ounces for women. twelve ounces of potatoes for men and eight ounces for women, also four ounces of bread each. Tuesday: Boiled beef and potatoes and bread in same quantity. Thursday: same dinner as Tuesday. Saturday: Boiled bacon and peas three ounces of bacon each. The Wash House The wash house is divided into two compartments one for the officers clothing and the other for the clothes of the inmates. Several women are engaged herein the week through, Saturdays excepted. They have plenty of work too, in washing the wearing apparel and bedding for over 300 inmates.

The various machines are driven by a steam engine situated midway in the wash house. A place heated by steam for drying purposes is also provided.

### **The Infirmary**

Leaving the outbuildings where so much needed work is done, we re-entered the main block and passed through the Masters Kitchen on our way to the infirmary. Here beneath this roof the dreaded demon of pain holds his revels, thrusting and driving his arrows of torture with fiendish delight into his weak prostrate, and unresisting victims.

Here weary heads toss through long, painful sleepless nights and pain fraught eyes look into yours with touching appeal for aid. In the first ward we entered many of the patients were in bed and had been there a long time. Some of them were so far worn looking one would conclude a little boy or girl lay there rather than that of an aged person. Fixed to the wall and over the head of each bed was a card upon which was entered the age, and the ailment of the patient. In one ward we saw an old woman whose age was close to ninety. She seemed to be asleep as we drew near, but on getting closer up she opened her dim eyes and mumbled something in response to a question from the nurse we did not quite overhear.

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She seemed to be asleep as we drew near, but on getting closer up she opened her dim eyes and mumbled something in response to a question from the nurse we did not quite overhear. In one bed is a young man of large build suffering from a complaint brought on through working in the rain at the quarries. I looked at this young man lying there, and I could not help contrasting his present position with that in which I have often seen him. Strong as a young horse he seemed as he went about his work keeping up with the others quite easily. At the other end of the ward was a cheery old scot, with a bronchial complaint.

In 1912 it became known as Moorlands Infirmary, holding that name until 1945 in 1949 it came under the new health care trust becoming known as Rossendale General Hospital. Final closure coming in 2010 and demolition in 2013

A more detailed description of the workhouse can be found here <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/index.html?Haslingden/Haslingden.shtml>