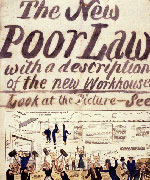
In the second half of the 18th century, the amount of poverty grew. To deal with this, the workhouse was created. The workhouse was a last resort for the poor, the ill, the young and the very old who went there to receive food and shelter in return for work. Everyone viewed it with dread and tried to avoid it for as long as possible.

Life at a workhouse was hard. In the summer the inmates began work at 6 am and 7 am in the winter. They could be working for up to 10 hours each day. It was designed to be dull to prevent them from taking advantage of the situation. Their jobs included stone-breaking, working in the fields and corn-grinding. They could also be used as a cheap form of labour. But generally, even though the work was hard, the food was good and the discipline was quite relaxed. This all changed in 1834.

In 1834, the Poor Law Amendment Act was introduced. One of the effects of this was that when new inmates arrived they would be kept in a holding ward and their health assessed. They would be placed in one of seven categories:

* Old or sick men
* Fit men and boys over 13 years of age
* Boys between 7 and 13 years of age
* Old or sick women
* Fit women and girls above 16 years old
* Girls between 7 and 16 years old
* Any child below 7 years of age

Conditions were now very harsh to deter all but the very needy. Discipline was very strict. Whippings and loss of food for those who disobeyed the rules were common. Consequently, there was a fall in the amount of inmates, which wouldn’t rise until the ‘hungry forties’. There was now very few able-bodied men and women, for those who were left were mainly the very poor and infirm.

Around the time when Charles Dickens published ‘Oliver Twist’, there would have already been the dramatic decrease in the amount of inmates. Often workhouses would only be about half full. This would change in a few years when the ‘hungry forties’ came into action.



‘Hungry forties’- a food crisis that struck Northern Europe in the 1840’s.

‘Holding ward’- like a temporary cell

Grace Ariana