

Since ancient times societies have felt the need to help its most vulnerable members. These societal needs are reflected in religious rules and in most religions around the world, charity is an important factor. The same is true for Christianity and there are numerous references in the bible. Some of these point towards the rewards which await you when you are charitable

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. - *Hebrews 13:16*

1. Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed. - *Proverbs 19:17*

Most churches had 'poor boxes or mite boxes' where churchgoers left some money for the poor.

However, from early Christianity onwards, through the Middle Ages, charity was not only administered by the church but also by those who could afford to be more charitable than others: the wealthy. Some manors had a place where they put food for the poor: Lynsted Court, near Doddington in Kent still has such a 'hatch' for leaving food for the poor on the left side of its magnificent gate, and the name of this road in Charing, next to Newlands with the Romanesque chapel.

## HUNGER HATCH LANE

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could be a reminder that there was a Hunger Hatch in the place called Newlands.

The Church was one of the main distributors of charity during the medieval period and gave out alms – such as money or food – to the poor and needy. Hospitals, run by religious orders, cared for the sick and poor and gave shelter to travellers.

Things changed, not completely but to a large degree, with the reformation when Henry VIII in his pursuit of Ann Boleyn shattered religious institutions.

The teaching of the English Protestant thinkers did not differ much when it came to the concept of charity, but the dismantling of the religious institutions during the reformation left a big gap in the provision for the poor.



Gentleman giving alms to a beggar: Illustration for "Of Pride" in John Day's *A christall glasse of christian reformation*, London, 1569

The ending of the alms giving by the church hit especially hard those places where the local manor was also held by the church. It was a double whammy. This was the case in Lenham. It has to be assumed that these changes caused disruption. Parliament and the crown did little in this period to help the poor and it was down to local communities to grapple with the issues.

The situation worsened at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century because there was a series of crop failures, there was a fall in wool trade, work was hard to come by, taxes increased, and inflation rose.

'A Vagabond above the Age of fourteen Years shall be adjudged to be grievously whipped, and burned through the Gristle of the right Ear with a hot Iron of the Compass of an Inch, unless some credible Person will take him into Service for a Year. And if being of the Age of eighteen Years, he after do fall again into a roguish Life, he shall suffer Death as a Felon, unless some credible Person will take him into Service for two Years. And if he fall a third Time into a roguish Life, he shall be adjudged a Felon.' ((14 Eliz. 1))

As the help for poor was different in the various villages many poor people left their home village and became de facto vagabonds. It is for us difficult to imagine that people had to ask permission to live in another town or village. There are similarities today in the laws governing

immigration: They are, to a degree, put in place to safeguard a country from an influx of people who cannot support themselves. In 1572 an act was passed the 'Vagabond Act'. Even wandering musicians were classified as vagabonds. If you left your home village without permission and were caught begging you could be whipped, bored through the ear and put to death.<sup>1</sup>

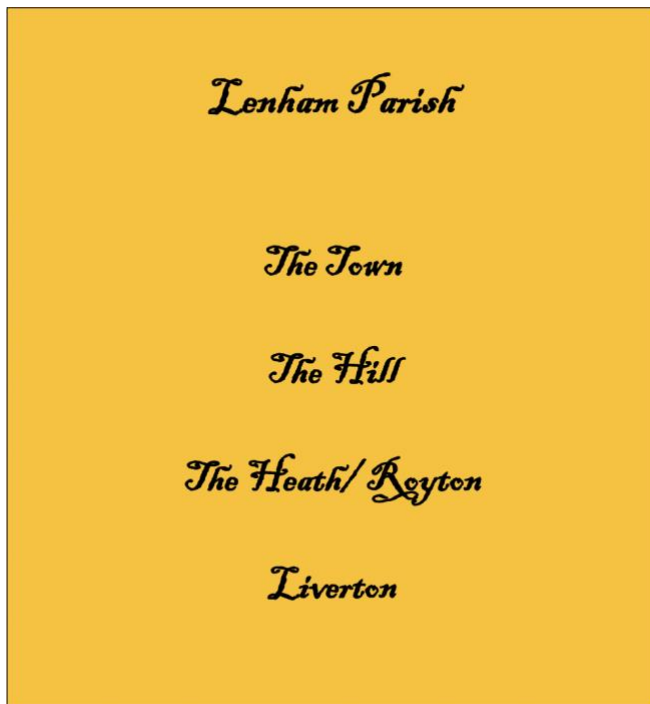
Eventually Elizabethan laws caught up with the problems facing local communities and a series of laws, the Elizabethan Poor Laws (most important one in 1601) regulated the care for the poor to a certain degree.

**Settlement Act or the Settlement and Removal Act.** The purpose of the Act was to establish the parish to which a person belonged (i.e. his/her place of "settlement"), and hence clarify which parish was responsible for him should he become in need of Poor Relief (or "chargeable" to the parish poor rates).  
see wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poor\\_Relief\\_Act\\_1662](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poor_Relief_Act_1662)

They brought in a compulsory Poor Rate system to which home occupiers had to contribute, according to their means.

The rates were set by the vestry: a predecessor's body to the Parish Council which was made up of the priest, the churchwardens and landowners.

For the collection of this local tax, the predecessor of the council tax, Lenham parish was subdivided into:



A new position was created: The overseer of the Poor.

The earliest record of two Overseers of the Poor in Lenham, John Hales and John Brockwell can be found in the first Deeds of the Honywood Charity from 1622. John Brockwell and his wife Margret are buried in the chancel area of St. Mary's.

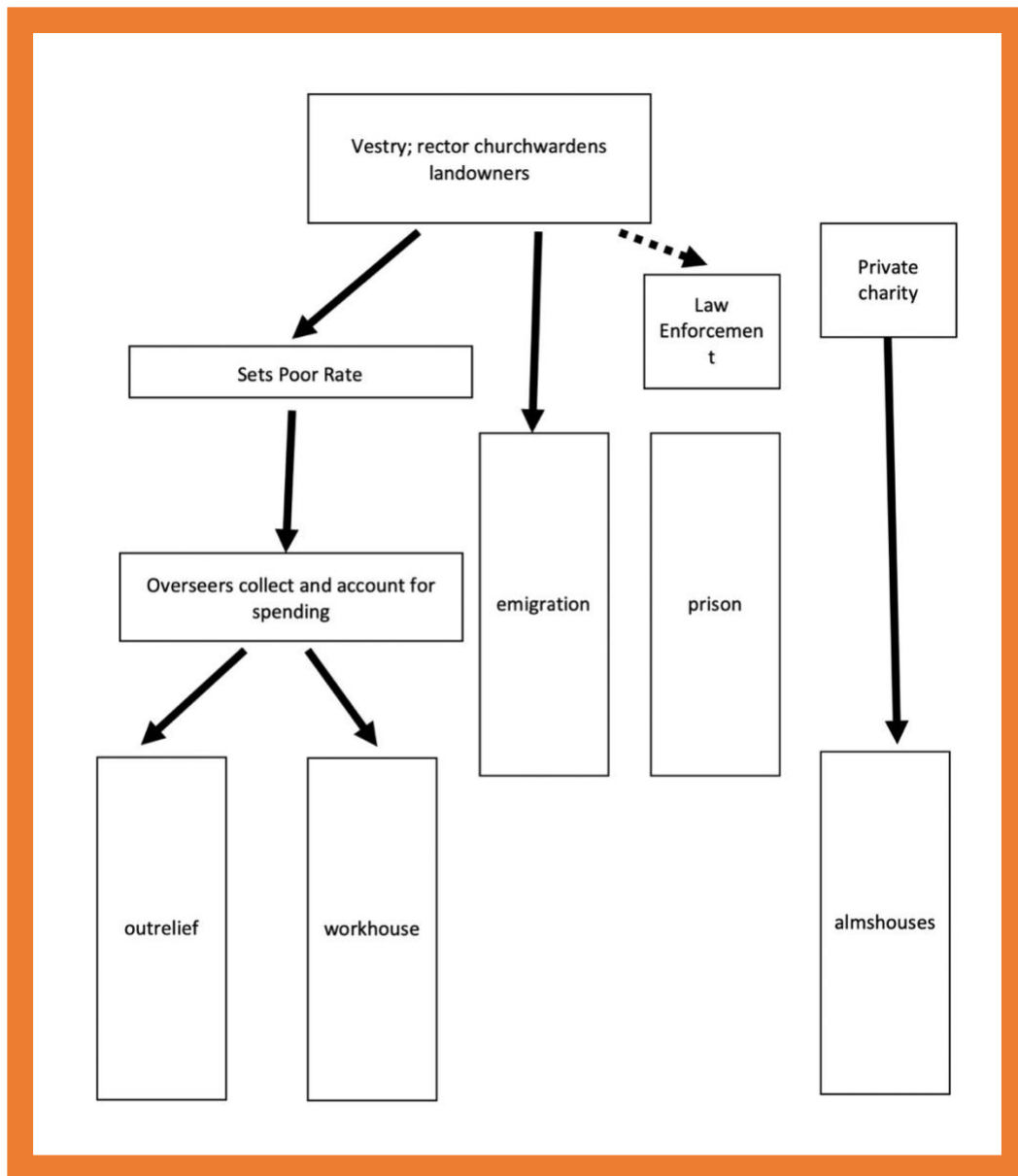
The Overseers of the Poor had to make certain that the money came in and nobody fell into arrears and that the money reached the people in need. Their income and expenditure were accounted for in the Overseers' books. A few of these accounts and vestry minutes from between 1731 and 1748 are held by the Kent archive. They give us some insight into the provision of the poor and the workhouse albeit not a

continuous record.

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<sup>1</sup> image: Hogarth, The enraged musician, 1741

## How the Poor Law worked.



Poor Relief by the vestry was given in two ways

1. Outrelief People in the community who had fallen on hard times were given help either financially or with goods.
2. The Workhouse In the beginning the workhouse will have operated as a sort of 'shelter' for those who needed it and, in some cases, the Lenham overseers relate to it indeed as the 'Poorhouse' but, given the opportunity the residents were made to work even in very dubious circumstances.





The analysis that people were idle because they were lazy was of course wrong. Work on farms was often seasonal work and, especially in Kent, there were early on practices of employing specialised labourers for certain tasks only during the time they were needed. In the winter months there was even in good times not enough work.

### **Outrelief**

Outrelief and the operation of workhouse were intertwined. People who couldn't cope with outrelief went to the workhouse. Goods which had been brought into the workhouse at some stage were given away as outrelief. Outrelief provided for People in the community who were in need. They received money or items which they needed., sometimes food. These items were not necessarily new but came from the workhouse and had been owned by people when they entered the workhouse.

On 28.11. 1740 the Vestry received some money which they had not expected, and they decided to give to

*'James Grants wife a pair of shoes and the two girls each of them a pair of shoes and two shift for the said Goody Grant and its further agreed upon that William Fullager shall have a Fear Nothing Coat.*

The wife of James Grant was called 'Goody Grant'.

**Many women were called 'Goody'. That, however, is not a first name, but it is the way a familiar women of the lower classes was addressed: not with Mrs, not by her first name but as 'Goody'.**

Perhaps Goody Grant was widowed because another day she received some money as she was "in need". On the same day a John Neeves who was also 'in need' received a bushel of wheat and so did Mrs. Burkenshaw. In February 1740 Mrs. Burkenshaw's rent was paid which had been "Due at Lady Day past". On the day it was also agreed *'further that Goody Sedwicks shall have two new shifts and one apron and a Senfling one And further That Goody Thompson shall have five shillings in Need and its agreed upon that Goody Jones shall have two shillings in Need'*.

Goody Glover received in 1735 1 Shilling for looking after her father and an allowance of 7S 6 pence for burying him.

In 1739 Goody Stedman was given 2 shifts and another member of the Stedman family received in 1756 sixpence, a bushel of wheat and a ...sheepshead. Goody Bottle for lodging the Widow Hills for 12 months 10 Shilling

And Edward Gosling was given 15 Shilling in 1740 so that he could buy tools for his trade. One of the tools was a hedging bill which was valued at 18 pence.

Some people were lucky and received new clothing: *Stephen Copper shall have one pair of shoes at Bozwell Beacon and one pair of breeches at Mr Lurcock and further that John Grants son William Grant shall have one jacket and one pair of leathern breeches and to be had at John Lurcocks.....(1740)* Bozwell Beacon must have been an ancestor to Basil Beacon whose gravestone can be found in the churchyard. It proudly announces that he was a cordwainer.... a maker of shoes.<sup>3</sup>

In 1736 Goodman Sevenses died. The goods which he had brought into the workhouse were: One flock bed and bed steddle and cord and four pairs of sheets and five shirts and one pair of shoes and two coats and two pairs of breeches and one pair of stockins and one broad girdle.

His bed, his sheets became part of the inventory of the workhouse.

When John Kilkhams from Liverton entered the workhouse, we have the note:

*An Inventory of all and Singles the Goods of John Kilkhams at Liverton in the Parish of Lenham in the County of Kent: Taken the 23 Day of December in the Year of our Lord 1735  
Two Tables and one Cupboard, one Bed and two pairs of shetts, ne chest, Two Boxes, one Spinning Wheel, Two porridge pots one Kettle and one Kneading Trough and one Warming Pan one pair of Creepers one cup, one Cob Iron one fire pan and Tongs.*

Most people who come to the workhouse brought with them a pot hook which was an essential piece of equipment to hang the cooking pot above the fire.



<sup>3</sup> see our churchyard survey under tab 'Spirit and Soul'

Widow Wood must have been rather well to do at some stage She brought 2 pot hooks in 1739. She also brought among a list of the things:  
1 rug, 1 flock 1 round table, 2 spinning wheels. 1 sack, a blue cupboard a bed stedle, 2 stool, 2 chairs, 1 tea kittle, corner shelves, 1 box8 white plates, a toastin iron and fork and three knives. (1739)

### **An Account of things Delivered out of the Workhouse by the Churchwarden**

John Skier had one Bed that Ruth Smith had out of the Workhouse 2 sheets one blanket one pillow,

Goody Gosling had one bedstead and Cord and Blanket and Bolster and one pair of the new sheets and two pillows for the cradle and piller coat and one pair of pot hangers.

Ann Waing had one chest.

Mary Waing had one Box and

Elizabeth Waring has had a box iron and Heats.

Goody Craft had one new pair of sheets and one sheet was cut to pieces to mend the other in the Workhouse.

Goodman Mackeldon two shirts and to

Goody Mackeldon two shifts.

### **The Workhouse**

Until now it is assumed in the published literature that the Lenham workhouse was set up in 1720ties.

We have however discovered a source 100 years earlier. In 1630 the then Lord of the Manor Henry Wilford of Quendon in Essex leased a parcel of land adjoining ‘Workhouse Close’ to Thomas Bartlett of Lenham.<sup>4</sup> It is very likely that ‘Workhouse Close was the alley between the Douglas Almshouses because that is where we know the workhouse stood, its mortuary (maybe of a later date) still being part of Lenham’s street scene today. What did the workhouse look like? We don’t know, but perhaps there was an earlier timbered building which was replaced by a building built of coarse stone like the mortuary which is dated as “early 18<sup>th</sup> century”.

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<sup>4</sup> **Descriptive Catalogue of the Original Charters, Royal Grants, and Donations ...** By Sir Thomas Phillipps, Sir Goldfrey Vassall Webster (5th bart.) see: <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=u0J-Elkcs64C&pg=PA220&dq=Lenham&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwid0sK-jcflAhVPSxUIHYyyBg8Q6AEIPjAD#v=onepage&q=Lenham&f=false> last accessed 26.9.2023



Some people died in the workhouse and as the workhouse was a crowded place, they needed the mortuary which still stands today on Faversham Road.



There were many entries about laying people to rest. One of them read:

Paid for laying of John Kemp forth Belonging to the Parish of Ore, Paid for Addavit, Paid four Men for carrying him to the ground, Paid for one pound of Wool and Combing.

### BURIAL IN WOOL

The Burial in Wool Acts 1667 and 1678, was legislation intended to promote the wool trade, requiring that corpses should be buried in wool. Initially the officiating priest was required to certify that a deceased person had been 'buried in wool' and later, relatives of the deceased had to swear an affidavit within eight days of a 'woollen burial.' This was recorded in the registers. Failure to comply resulted in a fine of 5GBP which was levied on both the estate of the deceased and on those associated with the burial. The acts were repealed in 1814, although long before then it had been largely ignored.

The 1678 Act stated that '.....no corpse of any person (except those who shall die of the plague), shall be buried in any shirt, shift, sheet or shroud or anything whatsoever, made or mingled with flax, hemp, silk, hair, gold or silver, or in any stuff or thing other than what is made from sheep's wool only....'

If someone was buried in linen an informer was entitled to half the fine. In consequence of half the fine going to the informant, the relatives of the deceased usually arranged that a relation or dependent should "inform" and thus secure the reward for the family.

What the workhouse was like can be visualised with the help of the inventories which are kept in the Kent Archive. With the coming and going of residents and their goods, the inventory of the workhouse was changing all the time, but the rooms stay the same. Sometimes the name change: the pantry is sometimes called the Buttery and the Bakehouse was at some stage called the Brewhouse. Maybe the residents at that time had their daily beer instead of their daily bread!

The inventory of 17<sup>th</sup> of July 1752 contains

a washhouse with 10 tubs and keelers ( shallow tubs), 2 coppers, 2 coper boilers, 3 stalders ( wooden stands for tubs, a forme ( a bench), a clothe horse, 3 pails, 1 water pot, two hand bowls, 1 copper saucepan, 1 tin saucepan one tin kettle, one dish kettle with cover, a coal badger ( bodger?) a cold badger a coal shovel.



In the Bakehouse 2 shovels, 2 woollen wheel, 4 troughs, 2 stools, 1 table, 1 sieve, 1 stalder, 2 weed hooks, 1 pitcher, 3 pair of hand cards, 2 peals, 1 handsaw, one large pan and draw iron.

**A peal ( also spelt "peel") is the paddle which bread is pushed in the oven and taken out. The tool and word are still in use for pizza baking.**

#### Kitchen

2 long tables and two formes, 9 chairs, one warming pan, one clock, one prep cupboard, 2 small tables, 6 pewter dishes, 24 trenchers, 18 wood dishes, 2 low stools. A small bell, skillet one ladle, one milk can and knife box

#### Workshop

7 spinning wheels, 1 winding wheel, 2 pair so ????

#### Pantry/Buttery

3 Brine tubs, 1 table, 1 wooden bowl, 1 wood platter, 2 stalders, 18 crocks, 6 barrels, 1 fry pan, there were also 10 white platters. They were originally brought in by a Widow Wood and must have been rather special, Tin glazed crockery.

There is a note that these white plates are now with Mrs. Epps.

She also had at the time the "Looking glass" from the Master's room....yet another example of goods being handed out as people needed them.

Masters Room 3 Square Tables, one oval table, a bible, 6 chairs, a pair of snuffers, fire pan and tongues, 2 iron candlesticks iron stove and poker, one square cupboard, one square glass, 4 glass prints in frame, one iron pot, box iron, one tin pins pot, 1 dredge box, 1 tin popper bed, one Lanshorn (?), one basket, ink stand and sand box, one small looing glass

One of the bed chambers was near the kitchen:

6 beds with coverings, 9 boxes, 2 chairs, a pair of bellows, a frame of a table, iron candlestick

Next chamber 4 beds with coverings, 4 boxes, 1 corner cupboard, 2 baskets, 2 chairs, 1 stool, 1 table

Under the roof there were the three garrets

Each of them contained 2 beds, and a chest or box.

Altogether there were 12 beds in the workhouse. We cannot assume that there was only one person in one bed. The occupancy of the workhouse was possibly double the number of beds. In a Parliamentary report of 1777, the Lenham workhouse had 40 residents.

We have not found any records of the income which the inmates of the workhouse generated. There is an order for wool and yarn but what the inmates made from this is not clear, and no income is accounted for in these books.

## **Agreements with Other Parishes**

The Vestry had agreements with other parishes to accommodate their paupers. The first such agreement was with Charing in 1730. The agreement was written on heavy paper and signed and sealed. It must have been a very expensive document because the later agreements with other parishes were jotted down in the account book. There was Oare, Milstead and relatively late in 1752 Harrietsham.

The agreements were all along the same lines. The parishes paid £6 to the Lenham vestry as an annual base rent. For every pauper in the workhouse, they paid a weekly rate of 2 S to the master.

The contracts had stipulations such as no paupers with infectious diseases, such as smallpox, rashes and fleas were allowed to be sent. If a new inmate was found out to be affected by such disease, rash or fleas, the Lenham workhouse had the right to send them

back to their parish and keep the rent. If a woman enters the workhouse and is pregnant, her home parish had to care for the child.

## **Expenses**

The workhouse had expenses for food. I came across orders for bushels of wheat, one peck of apples (16 pounds) and on one occasion only there was some pork on order. Sometimes Dr. Dering of Doddington had to be called. Another time a woman had to come into the workhouse to do the washing.

On one occasion the overseer paid 5s to a pauper in need and he also sent a man to go after the man's daughter who, obviously had done a runner. If she wasn't caught in time, she could be condemned to be vagabond.

## **And then...was there a life after the workhouse?**

Some people died in the workhouse. Some could leave.  
Here are some stories

- In 1740 It's further agreed upon that Mrs. Burkenshaw Kent shall be paid all what was Due at Lady Day past and further that Stephen Copper shall come out of the Workhouse and go to Mrs. Bottle and She to be allowed two Shillings a week for dour of them in the said house.
- Memorandum this 30th Day of April in the year of our Lord 1742. It's then agreed upon that Goody Swan shall have one shilling a week from the time she goes out of the workhouse.
- There was only entry where a woman was moved to the High House which was run by the Honywood Charity which was definitely a 'step up' from the workhouse.

- It was disturbing to read that children were 'fostered out' against a one-off payment.

*Received this 30<sup>th</sup> Day of December 1757 of Mr. John Foord Overseer of Lenham in Kent one pound and five shillings for taking upon myself the maintenance and bringing up of Thomas Cuckow. And in consideration thereof I do promise for myself my Executors and Administrators to indemnify and save harmless the said Parish of Lenham from all future Demands to be made by him or me or any other person for his maintenance and Clothing or Bringing up.  
X the Mark of John Carey*

So far, no other information about Thomas Cuckow or John Carey who might have been from another village could be found. In one record a child was "fostered out" to a person who was not even named. It is obvious that these children were open to abuse.

- On July 31st the wife of Edward Tridd was allowed to leave the workhouse with her three children. On the same day there is an entry "An account of Goods taken out of the Poorhouse for the use of Edward Tridd this 31st Day July 1758.:

One Bed and 'Sheddler' and Boulster one pair of sheets, one Rugg, one Blanket and Chiste, one pair of pott hooks bought for him over and above 6 oz on Tin Prittle cost 3=6 one chair cost 8 shillings.

We don't know for how long Edward Tridd's wife and Children were in the Workhouse, but we could find out that one of the children was just over a year old. Their daughter Susan was born on 1. May 1757. She spent at least some of her first year in the workhouse.

Also, on 31.7.1758 One the same Elizabeth Stedman took her child out of the workhouse and so did Ann Wilds

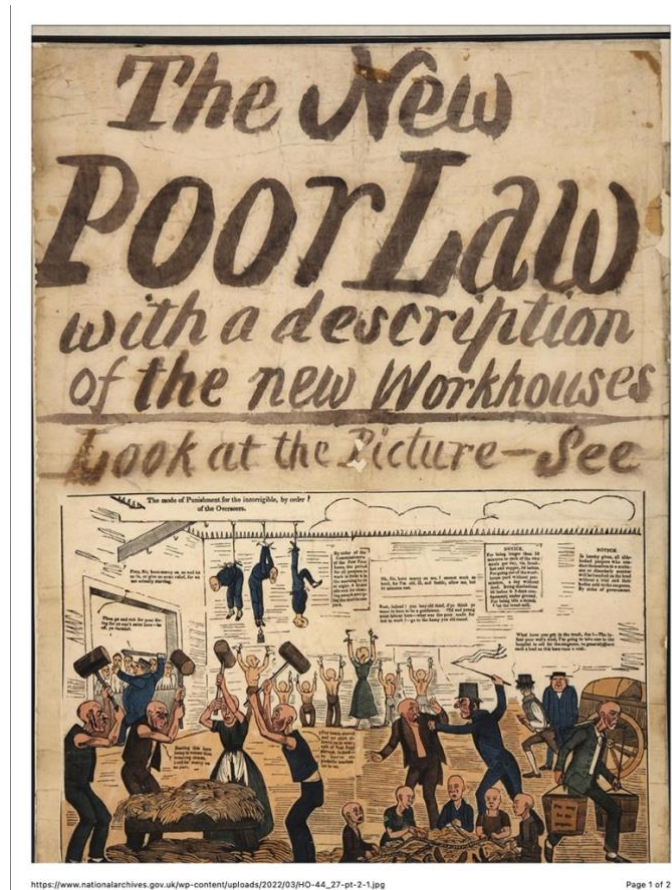
- Ann Wilds took her child out of the workhouse and had allowed her 10 S cash and 1 S per week . The child who had been in the workhouse was possibly Mary. She was born out of wedlock and baptized in 1755 and was 3 years old. The question is why was she in the Workhouse?

**A child identified as 'base born' was a child who was born out of wedlock.**



Another look in the Parish records show that Ann had another child who was “base born’... in February 1758. We can assume that the mother was unable to look after her first child during and shortly after her pregnancy. When her second child, a son was 5 months old, she took her daughter out of the workhouse.

However, the parish records show that on November 17<sup>th</sup> a John Wild, son of Ann Wilds, who was “base born’, out of marriage was buried in Lenham churchyard.



In October 1835 the Hollingbourne Union came into existence and the workhouse there was ready in 1836. It accommodated paupers from Bicknor, Boughton Malherbe, Boxley, Bredhurst, Broomfield, Chart next Sutton Valence [Chart Sutton], Debtling [Detling], Frinsted, Harrietsham, Headcorn, Hollingbourne, Hucking, Langley, Leeds, Lenham, Otterden, Stockbury, East Sutton, Sutton Valence, Thurnham, Ulcombe, Wichling, Wormshill.

We don't know exactly when the workhouse became completely redundant, but it was eventually demolished and in 1858 the North Row Douglas Almshouses were erected in its place. The almshouses on the opposite site of what was once 'Workhouse' Close were built in 1866. This charity set up by James Douglas Stoddard of Chilston Park provided housing for the poor of Boughton Malherbe and Lenham.

The Douglas Alsmhouses today are an attractive place to live.

