The introduction in 1838 of Poor Law legislation marks a watershed in attitudes to the plight of the poor and destitute in Ireland. Relief for the poor was to be within the confines of workhouses, which operated strict regimes, with compulsory labour, a monotonous diet and separation of families; all of which ensured that only the most destitute applied for relief. The Irish Poor Law was a copy of earlier English legislation, and by 1842 a total of 130 administrative unions had been established throughout the country. Each union built its own centrally located workhouse to accommodate paupers from the area. Workhouses were located in the main market towns of each area, outside a ten mile radius. The Limerick Workhouse was constructed at a cost of £10,000 and was operational by May, 1841. It catered for a population of 132,067 and an area of 197 square miles. The union was divided into 17 electoral divisions, five of which were in County Clare, and the workhouse had a capacity of 1,600 inmates, making it one of the biggest in the country. The Board of Guardians, who operated the union, were either elected by the qualifying ratepayers or were ex-officio members. Limerick Union had a total of 53 members, 40 of whom were elected.

The Poor Law Commissioners oversaw the running of the Poor Law system in the country. At first the commissioners were an extension of the English and Welsh commissioners. The four assistant-commissioners appointed in September, 1838, had “no experience of Ireland”, but subsequent to the amending legislation in July, 1847, a separate Irish commission was established. They communicated directly with the Poor Law guardians in all the unions. The communication were regularly read into the minutes of meetings of the Limerick Board of Guardians. As early as 1844 the commissioners were in dispute with the Limerick Poor Law Guardians over the attempt by the guardians to remove the clerk of the union. The board went on strike and the matter was only resolved when the commissioners forced a return to work by commencing legal proceedings. This episode indicates how little control the local guardians had in the running of their own affairs.

The Devon Commission provides valuable information on the state of agriculture in Limerick and the condition of the various strata of society immediately prior to the famine. Witnesses from Limerick Union included magistrates, Catholic clergy, farmers, small businessmen and landed proprietors, including William Monsell, landed proprietor at Tervoe and chairman of the Board of Guardians of Limerick Union.

There was a general consensus among witnesses that tillage was the normal agricultural mode for the union, and that the state of agriculture was improving for the farmer. In contrast, the state of the tenantry was “very wretched indeed”. Not surprisingly the landless labourers fared worst. “In many instances they are grievously harshly treated for want of food”. Another witness drew attention to the great influx of labourers to Limerick City in the previous three years. The labourers “generally come in suffering great poverty ... (and) ... occupy the most wretched hovels in the city”, Monsell, in his evidence to the Commission, described the condition of the people in the city as, “miserable beyond description”. A physician, called as a witness, referred to the high mortality in the city, particularly at earlier ages and cited fever, scarletina, measles and dysentery as the cause of death. A labourer commended: “People are so poor they are ready to eat one another”. Considering the prevailing destitution, it appears surprising that the countryside was so peaceful at this time. Witnesses to the Devon Commission confirmed the absence of agrarian disturbance in this period. “The country (was) never so quiet as it is now”. The evidence of the Poor Law guardians to the Devon Commission illustrated how aware the guardians were of conditions of the labourers in the union. William Monsell called for the setting up of public works to give employment and relieve the high levels of distress. Another witness expressed surprise that given the level of “destitution in this
city ... one third of the workhouse is unoccupied". Rev Maurice Fitzgibbon illustrated the objection of people to the workhouse: "They will not go at all (to the workhouse) ... there is the greatest objection ... they will not go in". The French traveller de Beaumont captured the attitude of the poor to the workhouse: "With one hand they offered the Poor an alms, with the other they opened a prison". Despite the objections of the destitute to the Poor Law regime, the workhouse numbers were high in the three months to September, 1845. The numbers of destitute people maintained in the workhouse in any one month in this period varies from 73 to 76 percent of the workhouse capacity. These figures contrast with perception of workhouses being under-utilised in the pre-famine period. Christine Kinealy points out that Lowtherstown Workhouse had only four paupers by the end of 1845. The Guardians of Lowtherstown Workhouse attributed the low numbers to the harshness of workhouse regulations and, in particular, the prohibition of tobacco.

Deaths in the workhouse rarely exceeded seven per week between June and August, 1845, while the percentage of paupers in the workhouse hospital remained marginally above 30 percent. On a closer examination of the sparse hospital statistics it is evident that infirm patients are by far the largest single category of those hospitalised, consisting of 58 to 59 percent of hospitalised persons for each of the months in question. The records do not provide any definition of the word "infirm". In the absence of information I am accepting the dictionary definition of "weak in health or body, especially from age".

For the same period in 1846, deaths are still remarkably low. On no occasion in this period do the weekly death rates exceed those for the corresponding period in the previous year. In fact, the average weekly death rate for June to August, 1846 was four inmates, which contrasts with five in 1845.

On a breakdown of the number who died from June to August, 1845 and 1846, the death rates per week are too small and the information too sparse to make firm statements. Nevertheless, one may offer some analysis. The highest number of deaths in the period May to August, 1845, were among infants, with 23 out of a total of 60 deaths. This figure was increased by nine deaths among infants in the week ending 9 August, 1845. The minute books for the Board of Guardians are quiescent on this high mortality rate among children during this period. The next highest category, females aged 15 years and upwards, provided 17 of the total number of deaths. The death rate here is far more evenly spread over the three months, with deaths almost every week. It is tempting to suggest that the female deaths may have been in the elderly or infirm categories but this analysis is based on intuition and a knowledge of the high numbers of infirm in the hospital wards. Males over 15 years accounted for fewer deaths, but this may be as a result of the imbalance in male and female admissions to the workhouse.

For the corresponding period in 1846 the total number of deaths was 54. The difference in the totals can be traced to the abnormally high death rate among infants in August, 1845. The three highest categories of death were males and females greater than 15, and infants less than two years. As in 1845, deaths among inmates over 15 are spread out over the three month period.

In the three month period June to August, 1846, the average monthly workhouse numbers varied from 80 percent to 88 percent of capacity. Surprisingly the lower percentage figure was recorded in August on the eve of a successive and more complete failure of the potato crop. It is of note that in the months prior to the 1846 harvest, expectations of a good harvest were reported in the local press. "... Crops of every description are much improved by the late rains and an early and abundant harvest is promised". This contrasts starkly with the dismal analysis earlier in the year of the poor in Pallaskenry. "... suffering from scanty meals and bad potatoes". Perhaps the peasantry may have left the workhouse with expectations of work and food.

Paupers were discharged from the workhouse by reporting to the master. The only condition of discharge was that the whole family leave the workhouse. On a number of occasions the master reported to the board on the high level of admissions and subsequent discharges from the workhouse. Over the eighteen month period June, 1846, to December, 1847, it is clear that weekly discharge figures were high. With rising death levels in early 1847, discharge figures were invariably approaching or above 200 people per week. The time period selected as illustrative of discharges corresponded with the rising death levels which peaked in April, 1847. I have suggested elsewhere but for these high discharge rates, the workhouse capacity would possibly have been reached in late 1846.

The admissions to Limerick Workhouse reflect the imbalance between male and female pauper figures characteristic of workhouse general statistics during the famine. The dichotomy is most evident in the 1846 figures for the period June to August. Females over 15 years of age contribute 43 percent of admissions, while males over 15 years of age make up 17 percent. For the corresponding period in 1845 males make up 26 percent and females 36 percent of the total admissions.

The breakdown of admissions for boys and girls under 15 years of age is far more evenly balanced, with boys making up...
16 percent for both years, and girls contributing a similar percentage.

In summary then, deaths in the Limerick Union Workhouse in the months prior to the reappearance of the blight in 1846 remained low. The numbers of workhouse inmates remained below capacity up to the end of August, 1846, and in fact were declining for the month of August. It would appear, then, in line with our expectations of low excess mortality up to late 1846, that while conditions were harsh for those at subsistence level, there were no reports of death by starvation in the Limerick Union.

Mary E. Daly has attempted to bring home this point by describing this period in 1845 as a "phony famine". However, by late 1846 distress was very evident. The Limerick City Relief Committee appealed for funds and stated "... there are hundreds of our fellow creatures who can scarcely command one meal in the day".

Workhouse Administration

Life in the Limerick Workhouse fitted the stereotype of a harsh regime, enforced labour and segregation by sex and age. On admission to the workhouse, families were split apart with boys and girls being sent to separate dormitories, and adult males and females were also segregated. However, the rules of the workhouse allowed limited contact between parents and children. Parents were allowed to see their children "at 1 o'clock each day for a quarter of an hour".

The guardians were concerned about the influence of "prostitutes and single mothers with infant bastard children" on other females within the workhouse. Proposals were submitted to the Poor Law Commissioners with a request for plans to build a separate building to house single parents and their children. Notice of a motion was served to "build a house for women of bad character and a boundary wall to keep these persons separate from other inmates of the workhouse". The lowest tender received for the "building for prostitutes" was accepted in August, with a further resolution adopted "... that on no account should any extras above £410 be allowed". This apparent parsimony of the guardians was to recur at all board meetings and reflected their financial fragility and the need to win approval of the Poor Law Commissioners for any developments of a financial nature.

The reluctance of the guardians to admit women of "doubtful character" was illustrated by an acrimonious board meeting in early June, 1846. A discussion took place on the merits of the admission of a single mother and her child. It was only resolved when a woman was admitted with her child, when the chairman pointed out that those who opposed the woman's admission, "ought to propose to turn all the rest who were of her character out of the house".

This episode illustrated the uncertainty which surrounded the guardians obligations and responsibilities. The chairman of the union argued for the woman's admission on the grounds that if she died "... the Guardians might be prosecuted for murder". Mr. Walnett, who moved that the woman be rejected, responded "I would like to know what section of the act that is to be found in". One may add, that the case is also illustrative of the moral standards of the Victorian period.

In an effort to control the high number of admissions and discharges in the workhouse, a resolution was adopted prohibiting any pauper who left the workhouse without the masters permission, from re-admission for another two months. It was not infrequent for women and children to be ejected from the workhouse if the husband did not return within the time specified by the master. This policy was adopted to discourage abandonment of women and children in the workhouse. Orders were served for the discharge of the "wife and children of William Condon whom the master allowed out for two hours and who has not since returned". Similar orders were made to discharge the wife of Thomas Moloney and their three children, "Moloney not having returned on leave of absence given to look for employment". Occasionally the guardians inquired into the marital status of women inmates. Following one such report, 25 women inmates and 61 children were discharged. A further 18 women were named as having been deserted by their husbands.

Records were also kept of the numbers of applications to the workhouse. There does not appear to be any uniform pattern of "rejections" and, as was the case for workhouse deaths, the guardians do not comment on the numbers refused admission. It is worth noting here, that it is not possible to reconcile the records of admissions and rejections of applicants for relief with general workhouse weekly statistics. Hence the figures should be treated with some caution.

I would suggest that in all likelihood people were refused admission on the grounds of eligibility rather than the workhouse reaching its capacity. Despite overcrowding and concerns about reaching the workhouse capacity, efforts were made to provide additional accommodation in the workhouse. T.P. O'Neil states that the whole family had to apply for admission to the workhouse. This suggests that the guardians were concerned about the probability of women and children being abandoned in the workhouse. Applicants were not refused admission on the grounds of overcrowding until December, 1847. It is likely that Limerick City, an established major market town, would have been an attraction for the destitute during the famine. In theory, at least, people were not refused admission on the grounds that they resided outside the union boundaries. One of the few distinctions between the Irish Poor Law and its English counterpart was the absence of the law of settlement from Irish law. This obliged a union to accept an applicant irrespective of his residence. The Poor Law Commissioner, George Nicholls, argued unsuccessfully for the inclusion of the law of settlement and commented "... vagrants from other districts may congregate in particular unions, and claim relief, or be sent to the workhouse".

Overcrowding had become a serious concern for the guardians by late 1846. One weekly meeting reported that there was "only accommodation for (a further) 20 males in the institution". In response to the accommodation crisis the guardians established a committee of five members to report to the board on the "best mode of carrying out this desirable object" of...
increased accommodation. The committee recommended alterations to provide an extra 220 places. The shoemaker’s shop, the infant school and the nursery were earmarked to provide extra dormitory places. Eighty hammocks were supplied to the dormitories as workhouse numbers reached 1,964 in late November. The minute book recorded that on completion of the alterations, total accommodation increased to 2,393.36 It would appear that the high levels of weekly discharges were partly a result of keeping the workhouse numbers down in 1846. It is clear also that the capacity of the workhouse was exceeded and that additional paupers were accommodated in cramped conditions. The consistent building programme and alterations to the workhouse ensured that the capacity of the workhouse increased significantly. Furthermore, the guardians appeared to be somewhat hostile to those who would not enter the workhouse, “... the streets swarm with beggars who should not be encouraged”.37

Details of the “Punishment Book” were regularly read by the master into the minutes of the board meetings for the period June, 1846; to March, 1847. Thereafter occurrences are infrequent, perhaps reflecting the priority given to other business by the guardians in the face of death and overcrowding. The most common offences were “disorderly conduct” and “assault”. Punishment consisted of confinement in the refractory ward for two hours each day for three days. The preceding referred to the magistrates. The latter action was the norm in cases of assault. On one occasion the punishment book noted the concealment of “seven pairs of stocking, two (pairs) the property of the union, in a child’s coffin that was going out for internment”.38 The punishment was no breakfast for a week. On another occasion two male paupers were discharged for “neglect of their appearance without accounting for two pairs of shoes given them”.39 The minute recorded in April, 1847, that “further whipping was not to be allowed unless sanctioned by the board”.40 In June, 1847, the punishment book recorded one girl “stealing a platter and two male inmates were discharged “for disorderly conduct and infirm” diet”.41 The/master complained of “the badness of bread”42 supplied to the workhouse. By August the increasing exasperation of the guardians at the quality of bread was evident. The master was found “negligent in accepting such bread” and 10 shillings was deducted from his salary and five shillings from the account of the contractor.43 By the end of August the master had advised the board to establish a bakery in the workhouse and a committee was set up to report on its viability.44 The master continued to report the inferior quality of bread and delay in its delivery, which in turn delayed breakfast in the workhouse. The contractor, seeking to profit, increased his intention to raise the price in January, 1847. The board responded by ordering the purchase of two mills for grinding corn.45 The rice contractor informed the board that he could not supply the board unless paid in cash.46 During February, 1847, the contractor failed to supply Indian meal to the workhouse.47 The minutes recorded in February that “no molasses (was) to be had in Limerick and the “paupers (were) obliged to eat stirabout”.48 The milk supply was also raised at board meetings. The board resolved that in the event of its non-supply, the cost of the coffee provided to the paupers should be charged to the contractor.49 However, the Poor Law Commissioners over-ruled the guardians and the board were ordered to provide milk in place of coffee.50 The confusion surrounding milk supplies continued into November and the board made further orders for the supply of coffee to inmates where the milk supply was not available.51

The guardians were aware of market prices for commodities and were not prepared to do anything to upset the

Diet

In the famine years the workhouse became a centre for much commercial activity. Tenders were regularly advertised in the local press and invariably the lowest price tender was accepted. The quality of supplies of bread to the workhouse were repeatedly brought to the attention of the board of guardians by the master. In July, 1846, the master complained of “the badness of bread” supplied to the workhouse. By August the increasing exasperation of the guardians at the quality of bread was evident. The master was found “negligent in accepting such bread” and 10 shillings was deducted from his salary and five shillings from the account of the contractor. By the end of August the master had advised the board to establish a bakery in the workhouse and a committee was set up to report on its viability. The master continued to report the inferior quality of bread and delay in its delivery, which in turn delayed breakfast in the workhouse. The contractor, seeking to profit, increased his intention to raise the price in January, 1847. The board responded by ordering the purchase of two mills for grinding corn. The rice contractor informed the board that he could not supply the board unless paid in cash. During February, 1847, the contractor failed to supply Indian meal to the workhouse. The minutes recorded in February that “no molasses (was) to be had in Limerick and the “paupers (were) obliged to eat stirabout”. The milk supply was also raised at board meetings. The board resolved that in the event of its non-supply, the cost of the coffee provided to the paupers should be charged to the contractor. However, the Poor Law Commissioners over-ruled the guardians and the board were ordered to provide milk in place of coffee. The confusion surrounding milk supplies continued into November and the board made further orders for the supply of coffee to inmates where the milk supply was not available.
January, 1847, that "the state of the corn...were only 8 Guardians present and there...weekly meeting on 20 June, 1846 "there was no business of the slightest...by guardians throughout the crisis of the...admissions to the workhouse. At the...guardians were mainly concerned with...to the harvest failure in 1846, the...interest". (7z)

The following week "the...Bust of Thomas Spring Rice.

The minute book recorded little...dissent among board members. Divisions among members were more evident in newspaper reports. Given the numbers of guardians on the board, it would appear that business was conducted in a remarkably amicable way. Occasionally the guardians express overt political opinions. In August, 1846, the guardians adopted a resolution proposed by Mayor Ryan and seconded by James Kelly M.P. for repeal of the Union. In adopting the resolution unanimously, the board ...deplore(d) any dissen...of the meetings of the repeal association". (7t)

A resolution was adopted and forwarded to the Lord Lieutenant in September, 1846, calling on him to open the food depots for sale of Indian meal as the "price of food (had) advanced too high for the purchase of the poor in consequence of private enterprise". (77)

Despite the poor attendance records of many guardians, others were quite vigilant in their attendance and vocal in their...
The net annual value of the property rated the union was financed by a local rate which was struck in March and in the union for 1847 was £206,861. The suggestion that Limerick City acted as a magnet in the famine years for those hands of any of the people of his religious structure was revised in 1850 and two local priest.

The workhouse capacity was extended to nearly 2,500 by early 1847. Without doubt, the admissions of nearly 300 paupers per week at the peak of the crisis, the acceleration of the fever crisis, and the financial problems of collecting the rates, must have contributed to chaotic scenes in the workhouse. In these circumstances one may argue that the guardians had little time to record their dismay in the minute book.

Nor were the guardians the only parties to remain silent on the mounting deaths in 1847. Neither Catholic or Protestant chaplaincy concerned seem to have been raised. Perhaps this reflected their helplessness and fatalism at the mounting crisis. The assistant Catholic chaplain attended the board in July, 1847, "to complain of indecent language to females by the laundry workman" and that the laundry workman "put in (the) hands of any of the people of his religious profession". This apparent pedantic action may be illustrative of how little the clergy could do in the circumstances. It may also be an illustration of the petty mind of a local priest.

**Population and Finance of the Union**

The financial situation of the union was precarious throughout the famine years. The union was financed by a local rate which was struck in March and September of each year. The rate was struck on the basis of the value of property and the trustees of paupers in the workhouse from each electoral district. The net annual value of the property rated in the union for 1847 was £206,861.

The 1851 census provides a backup to the suggestion that Limerick City acted as a magnet in the famine years for those seeking work, food, or simply admission to the workhouse. The union geographical structure was revised in 1839 and two electoral districts, Crecora and Fedamore, were ceded to the new Croom Union. As part of the restructuring, the number of electoral districts was doubled to 34. Hence a direct comparison of population change within the union between 1841 and 1851 is not possible.

However, Limerick City, alone of the electoral districts within the Limerick Union, in 1851 recorded a population increase between 1841 and 1851. The city population increased by 16.3 percent over the decade. Overall the union population declined from 38,828, or by 14.6 percent which puts into context the rise in Limerick City population. The population decline was even more dramatic in the Clare electoral districts within the Limerick Union. Population fell from 28,262 in 1841 to 10,483 in 1851, or by 67.1 percent. The dramatic decline in population in the Clare districts was comparatively less severe for the Scariff Union and illustrates how different regions within the same union fared during the famine years.

The financial state of the union was repeatedly brought to the attention of the guardians throughout the famine years. In November, 1846, Councillor Devitt stated that "if the entire amount of the present rate was paid up that only £1,000 would remain to provide for the paupers, the expenses now exceeding £500 a week". A loan was secured by the board from the National Bank for £2,089 at 5 percent "to meet the claims of contractors and weekly disbursements". An Extraordinary General Meeting was held on 21 November, 1846, in order to strike a new rate, to consider the financial state of the union, and to discuss overcrowding in the workhouse.

The guardians meeting in the first week of March, 1847, was met by a delegation of rate payers of Richmond ward led by merchant William Roche, who urged the guardians to postpone the striking of a rate for the arrears of 1846 and 1847, until the new rate collectors were appointed. The delegation attended the board in July, 1847, "to complain of indecent language to females by the laundry workman" and that the laundry workman "put in (the) hands of any of the people of his religious profession". This apparent pedantic action may be illustrative of how little the clergy could do in the circumstances. It may also be an illustration of the petty mind of a local priest.

A loan was secured by the board from the National Bank for £2,089 at 5 percent "to meet the claims of contractors and weekly disbursements". A notice of a motion to increase the city collector's salary from 7d to 9d in the pound was received by the chair in September, 1846. Two weeks later notice of a motion was received to block the proposed increase in poundage. On the same day the rural collectors lodged a request for an increase in their poundage to 1s in the pound. Notice of a motion from Mr Frost was then received to rescind the resolution for an increase in the city collectors' remuneration. Following the pay rise for Mr Hackett (city rate collector), there was a notable rise in the amount of rates submitted to the union, with £1,178 being paid in the Limerick Union in October by Mr Hackett (95). O'Neill cites the power of the rate collectors who "seized far in excess of the rates due and at Feakle, County Limerick, ratepayers whose property was distraint actually died of starvation".

With the approval of the Relief Extension Act which provided for outdoor relief in March, 1847, much of the
guardians time was directed towards setting up a new administrative system. A relieving officer was appointed to each electoral district (3 for Limerick City) at a salary ranging from £45 to £52 per annum. Each officer was expected “to reside in the district for which he will have to act, and (at) to give up his entire time to the duties of the office”.(105)

The first serious health hazard in 1846 occurred among female inmates, whom the medical officers stated had contacted Ophthalmia “of a bad character”.(106) The Board of Guardians were informed that hospital accommodation was insufficient for the inmates and consequently one of the girls dormitories was opened to accommodate those affected. E. Margaret Crawford points out that there was some confusion during the famine years over the diagnosis, with xerophthalmia being mistaken for ophthalmia.(107) Ophthalmia is an infection of the eye, while xerophthalmia is a condition caused by absence of vitamin A in the diet, which if untreated can lead to blindness. Since new milk is rich in vitamin A which could be found in the milk diet of the poor before the failure of the famine, it seems likely that the wrong diagnosis was recorded in the minute books. It would appear therefore, that the new milk provided to the infirm in 1846 was absent from the diet of some classes of the workhouse until the diet was revised in December, 1846. Surprisingly, the matter is not referred to again despite the apparent seriousness of the outbreak. Christine Kineally lists Limerick Union as one of the unions where the disease was more prevalent.(108) Crawford points to the diseases prevalence in the later famine years in the workhouses in the south and west.(109) However, August, 1846, was the only occasion from June, 1846, to June, 1848, when the illness was mentioned in the Limerick minutes.

Fever was a recurrent theme in the minute book. Barrington’s Hospital was opened to fever patients in January, 1847.(110) A medical report recommended that “a shed” for 300 fever patients be built alongside the north west boundary wall.(111) The master reported in June, 1847, that the admission of fever convalescents from St. John’s Hospital to the workhouse “tends to keep up the disease among inmates”.(112) The persistence of fever in February, 1847, resulted in the milk supply to the able bodied being replaced by “treacle in order that the sick and children have a supply of milk”.(113)

The guardians established a number of temporary fever hospitals under the Temporary Fever Act 1846.(114) In May, 1847, the Board of Guardians received a written request from some inhabitants of Castleconnell “praying that a fever hospital should not be established there”.(115) Perhaps the opposition was based on the grounds of the contagious nature of fever which swept the country in 1847. At the following weekly board meeting it was resolved “to establish a temporary field hospital at Coolaree, for the district of Castleconnell under the superintendence of Dr O’Riordan”.(116) Other field hospitals were erected at Cappamore and Kilokennedy. In early June there were 112 paupers applying for admission to the workhouse, “principally persons who were either in fever or had been discharged from the city hospital”.(117) A recommendation was adopted in August, 1847, that “from this day forward no more people with fever or dysentery (were to) be admitted to the workhouse hospitals”.(118) The master was then ordered “to remove patients now in the workhouse to Barringtons Hospital”.(119) Workhouse staff occasionally fell sick. A letter was read into the minutes from a nurse “now ill, (with) no means to support herself”.(120) She was allowed to remain in the workhouse for two months “after which she be allowed £1 1s. to go home to Belfast”. In February, 1847, the guardians applied to the Christian Brothers for a person to act as a schoolmaster during the illness of the incumbent schoolmaster.

Death in the Workhouse

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The first reports of death at the guardians weekly meetings occurred in December, 1846. The workhouse statistics confirmed the rise in deaths. From December, 1846, to the mid-May, 1847, deaths exceeded 20 each week, almost every week, and peaked at 108 in the week ended 10 April, 1847. Thereafter the deaths declined rapidly and stabilised around a dozen deaths per week from late-May, 1847, to the end of the year.

The hospital statistics are rudimentary and inconsistent, only breaking patients into a few basic groups. From June, 1846, until the middle of November, 1846, there are only two categories in the hospital, those “sick in hospital” and “fever” patients. In the three month period September to November, 1846, fever patients stabilise around the mid-twenties. By Autumn the change in hospital numbers is dramatic, best exemplified by the fact that at the end of October 105 inmates were hospitalised. Within two weeks there were 526 inmates in hospital. So explosive was this change, that for two out of the four weeks in November/December no hospital records were kept. This would seem to indicate how overwhelmed the authorities were by the proceedings. The medical report in January, 1847, stated that “due to insufficient hospital accommodation some of the infant children died in the nursery and dormitories.”

By mid-November, 1846, those “sick, not confined to bed”, and those “sick in infirm wards” had grown enormously. By the end of November, 1846, 194 patients were not confined to bed. This category peaked by early January at 350 and then gradually declined to 150 by early April. By the end of November, 1846, 221 patients were sick in the infirm wards. This category remained remarkably stable over the next six months. It peaked in mid-February at 263 and gradually declined to 216 by early April, 1847. It is tempting to suggest that the reason for this stability could have been that the old in the workhouse contributed to the death statistics in large proportions.

Fever in the workhouse was not a new experience. Records for 1844 and 1845 recorded fever as “prevalent in the workhouse”. The minute book for the workhouse for 1844 indicates that 127 patients were hospitalised in late-December, 1846, to the end of January, 1847 stated that “due to insufficient hospital accommodation some of the infant children died in the nursery and dormitories.”

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