

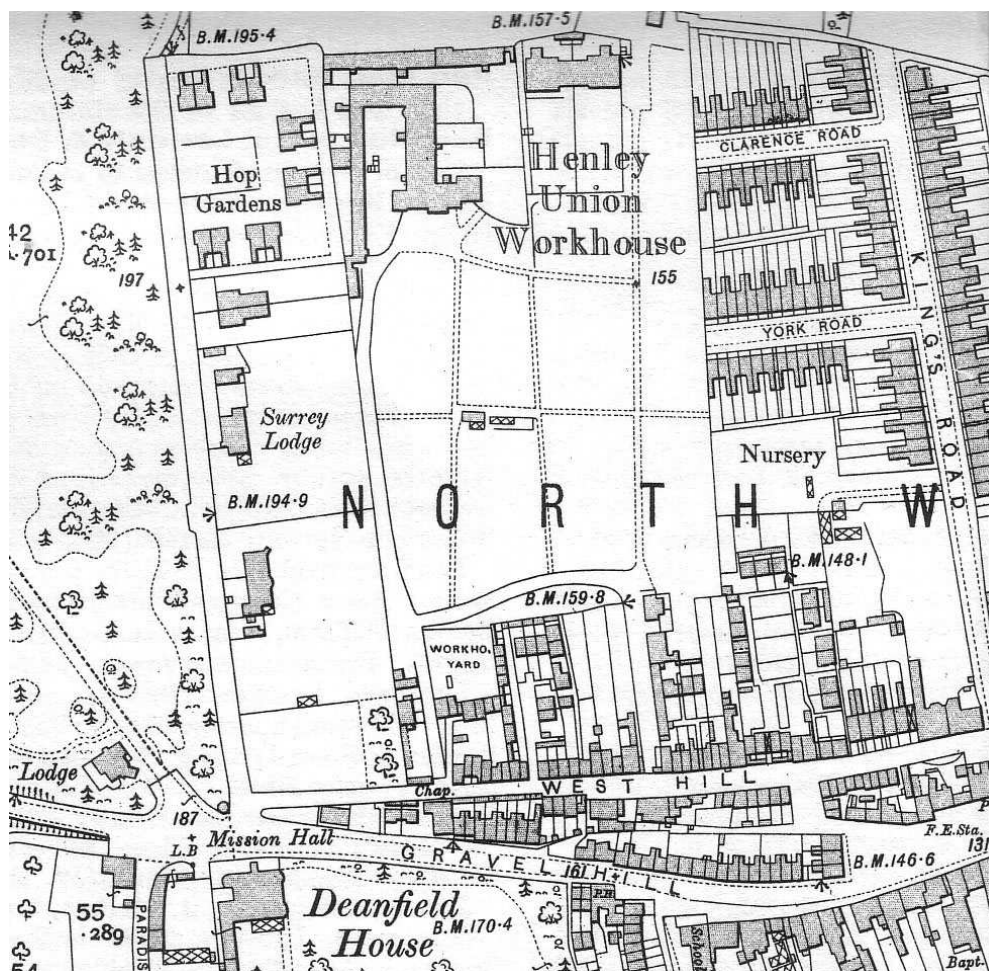
The Henley Poor Law Union Workhouse

The Development of the Workhouse

During the English plague or Black Death in the 14th century, the movements of workers and beggars were restricted and the county Hundreds were made responsible for their own poor. Those incapable of working were allowed to beg.

In the 16th century several Acts were passed concerning the poor. Churchwardens and parishes were required to give work to the poor, relieve those incapable of work and provide apprenticeships for poor children. This was reinforced at the beginning of the 17th century and parishes began to set up workhouses where poor children could be given work and an apprenticeship. Adults could also be provided with work to stop them begging.

Following Gilberts Act of 1780, which authorised parishes to unite and set up workhouses to serve the purposes already mentioned, a workhouse was erected in West Hill, Henley-on-Thames in 1790. A Board of Guardians appointed by Justices of the Peace controlled these workhouses.



Location of Henley workhouse from 1910 map

There was also a 'pest house' or isolation ward to house inmates with infectious diseases in the centre of the workhouse site.

An amended Poor Law Act in 1834 allowed Poor Law Commissioners to be appointed. The Henley Poor Law Union was formed in 1835 with 27 guardians representing 21 parishes. They negotiated the take over of the Henley workhouse. It was then enlarged from accommodation for 150 inmates to 250.

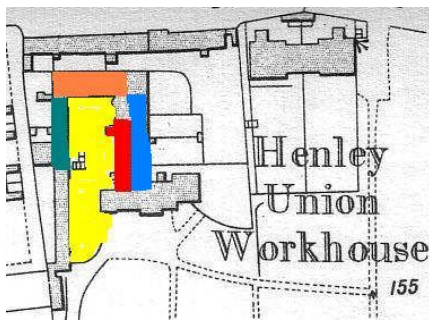
An infirmary was added to the Henley workhouse in 1841 and a full time nurse was appointed in 1850. In 1873 schoolrooms were added to the workhouse. Here a full time schoolmaster and schoolmistress could educate the pauper children.

New wards and a mortuary were added in 1909.

In 1929 a Local Government Act abolished all Poor Law Authorities and the workhouse became a Public Assistance Institution, run by the local council.

In 1948 the National Health Service Act came into force and the Henley workhouse became Townlands Hospital. The buildings of the workhouse remain at the hospital, although new wards have been built. Some of the buildings are now in a poor state of repair and are boarded up and others are used for storage and for the hospital kitchens.

The Workhouse Buildings of 1790

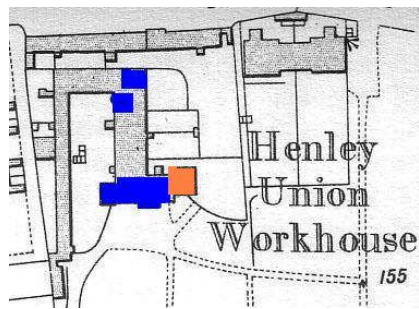


Key:
Courtyard – yellow
Men's day room – green
Women's day room - blue
Entrance – orange
Dining room - red



Henley workhouse in 2009 – the courtyard and the original buildings

The Workhouse Buildings of 1835

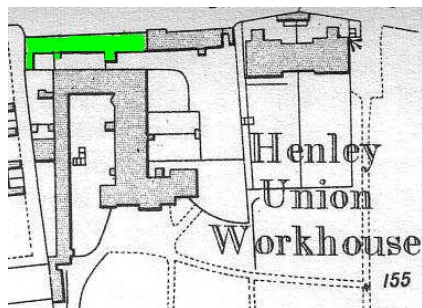


Key:
Workhouses offices – blue
Women's day room - orange
(Those in the corner of the courtyard were from 1790, for the Master and the Matron)



Henley workhouse in 2009 – the Board Room, Clerks' Office and women's day room added in 1835

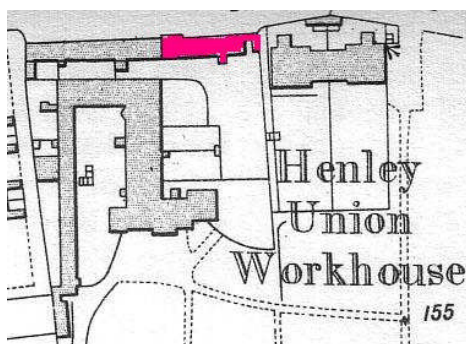
The Workhouse Buildings of 1841



Key:
Men's wards - green



Henley workhouse in 2009 – the men's wards of the 1841 infirmary

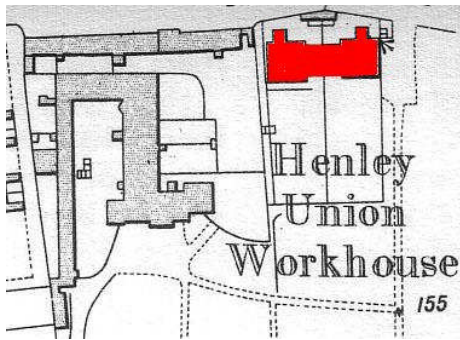


Key:
Women's wards - pink



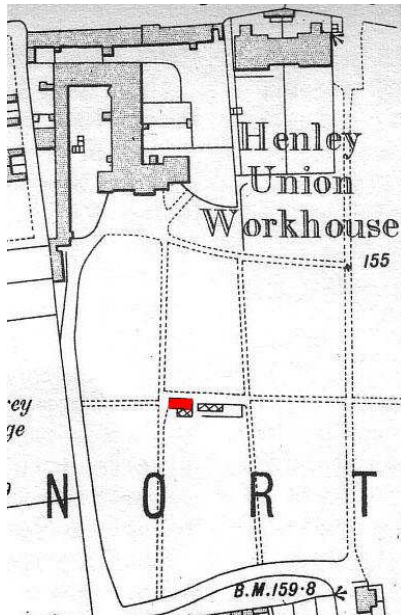
Henley workhouse in 2009 – the women's wards of the 1841 infirmary

The Workhouse Buildings of 1873



Henley workhouse in 2009 – the school buildings and playground built in 1873

The Pest House



The Pest House in 2009 – overgrown and derelict

Key:
The Pest House - red

In February 1794 two Troopers from the King's Light Dragoons stationed in Reading occupied the Pest House for eight days. One had small pox. The other, who had been charged with caring for him was Silas Tomkyn Comberbache. This was an alias used by the poet Samuel Coleridge Taylor.

Suffering from debt due to an addiction to opium, alcohol and women, Coleridge had left Jesus College, Cambridge where he was studying and joined the army. But, barely able to ride a horse, he was given the job of nursing his fellow recruit.

His time spent in the cramped conditions may have been part of the inspiration for his poem The Ancient Mariner.

Henley Union Workhouse Census Returns – Staff and their families

1841

Name	Occupation	Gender	Age
William Jackson	Master	M	55
Martha Jackson	Matron	F	55
Eliza Jackson		F	35
Sara Jackson		F	20
Henry Jackson		M	15
Thomas Gutteridge	Gate Porter	M	50
John Firkin	Schoolmaster	M	45
Sarah Dowling	Schoolmistress	F	40

Samuel Mortlock was appointed as Master of the Henley workhouse in 1848. He was able to get his family onto the full time staff, His wife Ann became Matron and his son Samuel Allen was trained as a clerk. Later his niece Eliza joined the staff as Assistant Matron.

Eliza became Matron in 1866 following the death of Samuel's wife Ann.

Samuel Mortlock died aged 75 in 1884, thus ending his 36-year tenure at the Henley-on-Thames workhouse.

During this time Samuel was frequently before the magistrates, prosecuting inmates for assaults on him. In 1873 he was even assaulted by the schoolmaster. He won many prizes at the annual Henley Horticultural Society and Royal Berkshire shows for his flowers and vegetables, which would have been grown in the ten acres of grounds attached to the workhouse. He also championed the resurrection of Henley Cricket Club in 1869.

1851

Name	Occupation	Gender	Age
Samuel Mortlock	Master	M	42
Ann Mortlock	Matron	F	43
Samuel A Mortlock		M	19
Joseph R Wood	Schoolmaster	M	43
Ann Wood	Nurse	F	46
Susannah Dumbleton	Schoolmistress	F	32
Thomas Livingstone	Gate Porter	M	55
Emma Livingstone	Gate Porter	F	53

1861

Name	Occupation	Gender	Age
Samuel Mortlock	Master	M	52
Ann Mortlock	Matron	F	53
Eliza Mortlock	Assistant Matron	F	30
Henry Williams	Schoolmaster	M	28
Susanah Harden	Schoolmistress	F	35
William Davies	Gate Porter	M	50
Ann Davies	Gate Porter	F	52
Kate Norman	Nurse	F	46
Matthew C Swift	Cook	M	59
Mary Ann Hill	Laundry woman	F	25

1871

Name	Occupation	Gender	Age
Samuel Mortlock	Master	M	62
Eliza Mortlock	Matron	F	42
David Coy	Schoolmaster	M	25
Alice Dickson	Schoolmistress	F	25
Eliza Stevens	Nurse	F	37
Elizabeth Thomas	Laundress	F	47
James Spickernell	Gate Porter	M	50
Martha Spickernell	Gate Porter	F	43
Alfred Spickernell		M	13
Emily Spickernell		F	10
Ann Smith	Cook	F	35
William Boyce	Assistant to the Master	M	56
John Payne	Assistant Schoolmaster	M	17

1881

Name	Occupation	Gender	Age
Samuel Mortlock	Master	M	72
Eliza Mortlock	Matron	F	52
Emma Vernon	Assistant Matron	F	24
William White	Schoolmaster	M	42
Annie White	Schoolmistress	F	34
Annie Shirwood	Nurse	F	58
John Thurland	Assistant Schoolmaster	M	54
Jonathan Miles	Engineer	M	52
Elizabeth Miles	Superintendent of Laundry	F	48
James Spickernell	Superintendent of Labour	M	60
Martha Spickernell	Gate Porter	F	53

1891

Name	Occupation	Gender	Age
John Martin	Master	M	50
Sarah Martin	Matron	F	45
Honorina Walsh	Schoolmistress	F	39
Maria Musselwhite	Nurse	F	44
Ann Simmonds	Laundress	F	29
William Arthur Clark	Gate Porter	M	21
Charles Varney	Engine Attendant	M	24
George Mass	Gate Porter	M	35
Hannah Mass	Gate Porter	F	39

1901

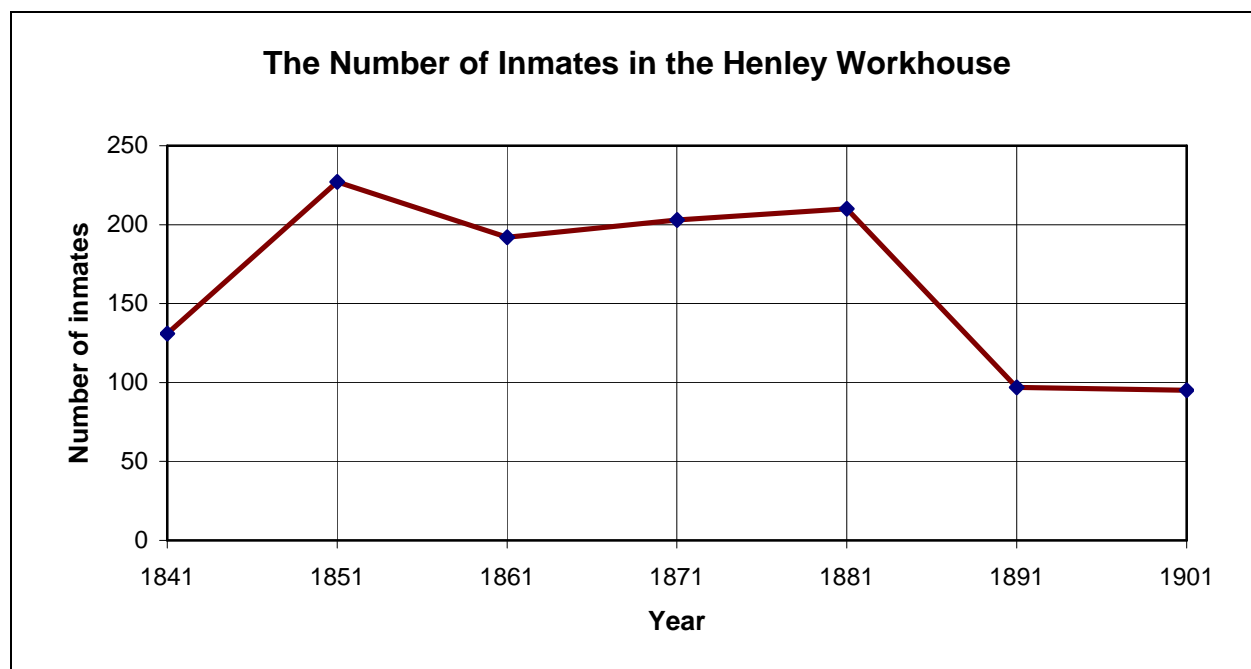
Name	Occupation	Gender	Age
George Burton Simmons	Master	M	32
Mary Elizabeth Simmons	Matron	F	32
Mark Frederick Mayo	Gate Porter	M	28
Emily Elizabeth Mayo	Cook	F	32
William Turner	Stoker	M	38
Sybil Turner	Laundress	F	41
Edmund Norman Knight	Gate Porter	M	32

Emily Knight	Gate Porter	F	32
Bessie Helen Knight		F	1
Mary Ann Farmer	Nurse	F	34
Horace Victor Simpkins	Children's Trainer	M	31
Alice Simpkins	Children's Trainer	F	27

Henley Union Workhouse Census Returns – Inmates

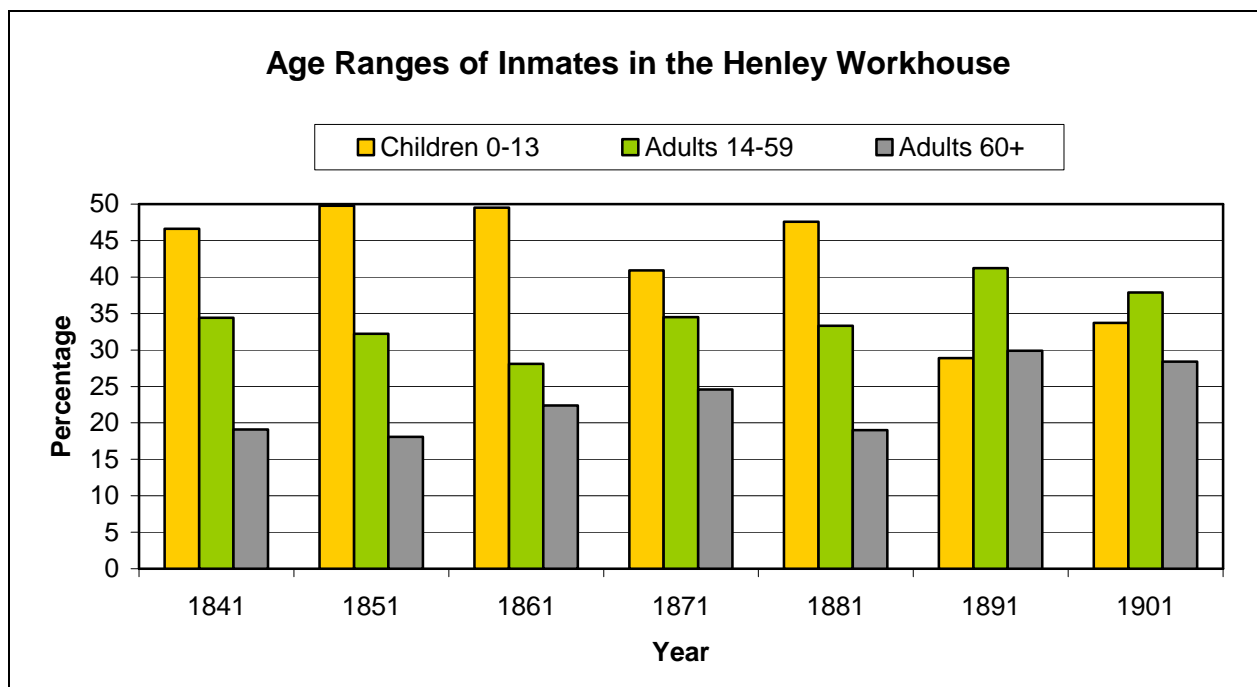
		Males 0-13	Females 0-13	Males 14-59	Females 14-59	Males 60+	Females 60+	Total
1841	Number	25	36	20	25	15	10	131
	%	19.1	27.5	15.3	19.1	11.5	7.6	100.0
1851	Number	52	61	31	42	28	13	227
	%	22.9	26.9	13.7	18.5	12.3	5.7	100.0
1861	Number	49	46	17	37	30	13	192
	%	25.5	24.0	8.9	19.3	15.6	6.8	100.0
1871	Number	38	45	32	38	38	12	203
	%	18.7	22.2	15.8	18.7	18.7	5.9	100.0
1881	Number	49	51	38	32	21	19	210
	%	23.3	24.3	18.1	15.2	10.0	9.0	100.0
1891	Number	14	14	20	20	22	7	97
	%	14.4	14.4	20.6	20.6	22.7	7.2	100.0
1901	Number	16	16	14	22	17	10	95
	%	16.8	16.8	14.7	23.2	17.9	10.5	100.0

Henley Union Workhouse Census Returns – Comparisons of data



The increase in numbers between 1841 and 1851 is associated with the building of the infirmary in 1841-42.

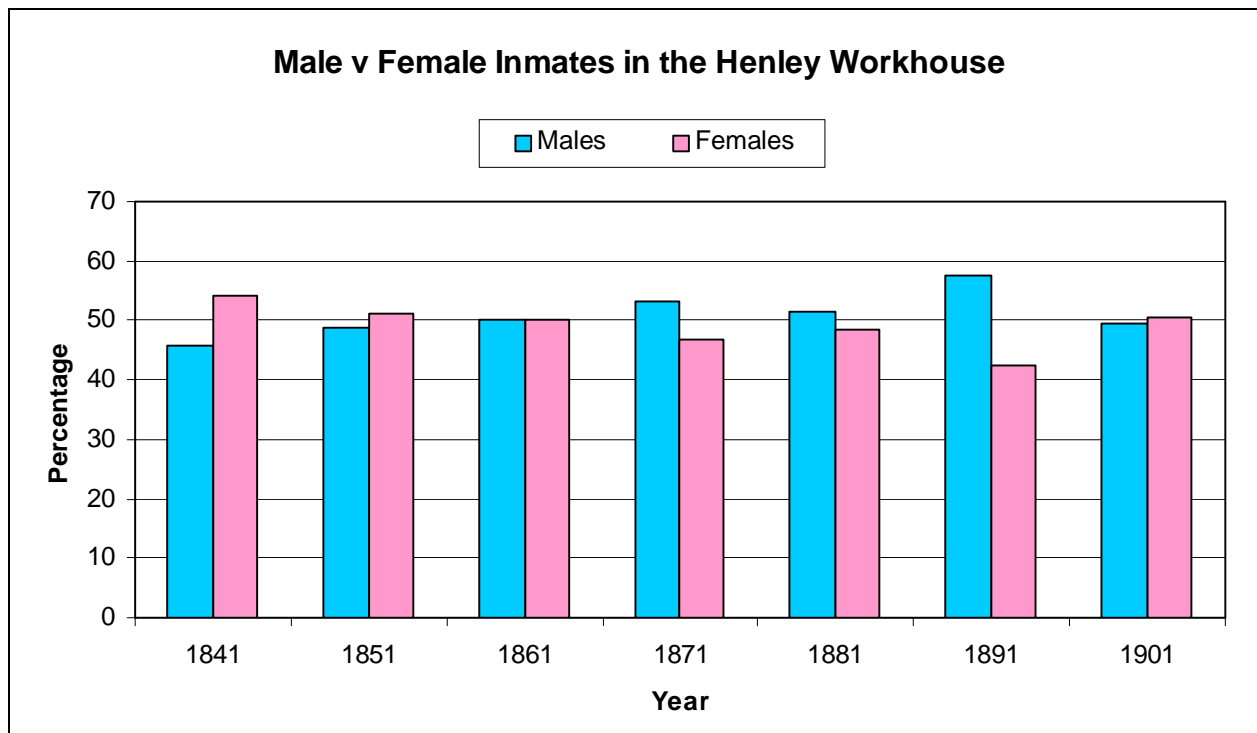
The drop in numbers between 1881 and 1891 is mainly of children. The opening of a new National School in Gravel Hill, Henley in 1879 may have contributed to this.



Up until 1902 the school leaving age was 13, so the children in the 0-13 age range were scholars, making up almost half of the workhouse population.

The employable adults in the 14-59 age range had a variety of potential occupations, the most common being that of an agricultural worker.

Some inmates suffered from disabilities such as blindness, epilepsy and idiocy from birth. These are only recorded in the annual censuses from 1861 onwards.



Further photographs of the Henley Poor Union Workhouse in 2009



The workhouse school



Women's day rooms (left) and wards (back, right)



Workhouse entrance porch



Buildings between the men's and women's wards of the infirmary