

## **HELEN SMITH**

### **Title**

The English Workhouse and its Records

### **Summary**

The dreaded workhouse came into being in England due to the introduction of the New Poor Law in 1834 and the establishment of the Poor Law Unions. The workhouse was deliberately made to be as unpleasant as possible so that people didn't think it as an easy option but instead a place of last resort.

### **Abstract**

This presentation covers how poor relief was done prior to 1834 and the changes that occurred due to the establishment of the 1834 Poor Law Acts and the workhouse. It will explain the social attitudes to the poor, differentiating between the deserving and undeserving poor and will talk about the establishment of the workhouses and the policy of separating the people into seven groups and how the daily regime was regulated to make life as uncomfortable as possible.

The presentation will also explain some of the social conditions that necessitated entry to the workhouse.

Due to the high level of Government control there was left a legacy of documentation which can allow us to trace our ancestors through their time in and out of the workhouse. We will discuss the range of records that can include the records of admissions and discharges, Creed registers, registers of births, baptisms, deaths and burials, registers of apprentices and indentures, records of families assisted to emigrate, medical records and punishment books. There are also records of staff and where these records can be found including archives, paid subscription sites, Workhouse.org site.

We will follow a family in and out of the workhouse to see the types of records that can be found and will look at the newspapers to see what information can be found about the Boards of Guardians and social attitudes to conditions within the workhouse. Finally, we will talk about the Government enquiry and how conditions evolved until the demise of the workhouses and the continuing social attitudes in the 1940s onwards even though many had become the hospitals of the new National Health Service.

### **Audience**

Intermediate