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Roscrea Poor Law Union: its administration 150 years ago

By Thomas Deegan

The history of the 19th-century Irish Poor Law may be divided into three different phases — the early (pre-Famine) period from 1838 to 1842-3; the critical years, from the mid-1840s through 1850 and beyond and the post-Famine era. This article attempts to look at some aspects of the administration and management of one Poor Law Union, that of Roscrea in the North Riding of co. Tipperary, in relation to each of the three phases.

The principal sources used are the minute books, rough minute books and letter books of Roscrea Poor Law Union, now in the Tipperary County Archive at Library Headquarters, Castle Avenue, Thurles. These sources are referred to in the footnotes as “Minutes”, “Rough Minutes” and “Letters,” respectively.¹

Roscrea Board of Guardians admitted paupers to their workhouse for the first time on 3 May, 1842.² A total of 36 persons were proposed and accepted at a meeting held on that date. They ranged in age from one year to 95 years, 20 females and 16 males, all but two being Roman Catholic.

The reasons for their seeking admission to the workhouse were listed as “destitution” or “infirmity”, two aged 2 and 5 being designated “orphans”. The 1-year-old belonged to a family of five, all admitted at the same time. In addition to the two orphans, five other children were admitted unaccompanied, aged 4, 6, 8, 11 and 12.

The family of five admitted together was a relatively lucky one. They were, of course, about to be split and kept in separate wards, divided firstly by sex and then by age. Breaking up of families on admission to the workhouse was part of the “Workhouse test”. The Poor Law policy was to discourage all but absolutely destitute and desperate paupers from seeking entry at all.

This family was at least in the same workhouse. Later, when Unions were forced to establish auxiliary workhouses in the wake of the Famine, and then to combine two or more Unions for the purpose of having a District School in the central one, families could find themselves split among several workhouses. Such a case, involving Roscrea and Donaghmore Unions, was brought to the attention of the Poor Law Commissioners in early 1861. The Commissioners, informed by their Inspector, Mr. Otway, that “the sending of children to Roscrea is disliked,” instructed the Donaghmore Union Guardians to discontinue observing the District School Order.³

Sometimes, a Board of Guardians would take it upon themselves to ignore orders quietly, for example in the religious education of foundlings and orphans. The Attorney-General in 1842, Sir Francis Blackburne, directed that all such children be baptised and brought up as Protestants, Protestantism being the state religion. However, Boards of Guardians usually consisted mostly of Catholics, and foundlings and orphans were almost exclusively the offspring of Catholic parents.

At its meeting on 3 September, 1842 Roscrea Board of Guardians resolved — “... in the case of admittance of Foundlings into the Establishment, ... they shall invariably be educated in the Religious persuasion of the Persons who shall find them and present them for Admittance always excepting such cases wherein a written statement shall be found describing the religion of the parent...”⁴ Roscrea Board was not alone in taking exception to the Attorney-General’s ruling.



Blackburne's judgement was eventually overruled by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1862.

Religious controversy also reared its head in the schoolroom. William Scanlan was dismissed from his appointment as a teacher in Roscrea Union Workhouse because, as he complained to the Board of Education, "... they knew I am a Protestant..." Although he had been elected a schoolmaster by Roscrea Board of Guardians, the appointment was not approved by Dublin. He was sent to CloghJordan, "to one of Mr. Frennd's schools," ostensibly to complete his training. While there Mr. Lynch, Poor Law Inspector of Education, suggested to Scanlan that he resign the position he had been offered in Roscrea. "This I declined respectfully but decidedly."⁵

After receiving no support from the Guardians Scanlan decided to cut his losses and emigrate; "...I sent to the Guardians a bill of £4-8-6 ...to go to America." He got no satisfaction on this score either. The Poor Law Commissioners informed him that they "could not interfere in his case,"⁶ and Scanlan felt "treated in a most capricious and extraordinary way, ... my little boy and myself ... thrown on the world without any means of support."⁷

Roscrea Union Workhouse was situated in the townland of Scart, on the site of the later District Hospital. Like all workhouses built under the Irish Poor Law, it was roughly cruciform in shape. The front building comprised the Clerk's office, meeting-room, reception area and probationary wards. The main building, a long oblong block, a short distance behind this, contained the schoolrooms and dormitories, and the Master's and Matron's quarters.

Joining this to the third building, the Infirmary, was the dining -hall. The Infirmary comprised the Hospital and the "lunatic wards." Outside were exercise yards and gardens, the entire complex being surrounded by a high wall.⁸

Roscrea Workhouse was intended to accommodate 900 people.⁹ However, as the conditions of the "destitute poor" continued to worsen during the decade, more and more people sought refuge in workhouses. Though 1847 was the worst year of the Famine, 1851 was to be the year of the greatest workhouse dependency, and also of the highest emigration.

Roscrea Guardians had now leased Mr. Edward Stephen Egan's Brewery premises in Abbey Street, where Parkmore House is today, as an "auxiliary workhouse" in the town.¹⁰ However, ten years later in 1861 demand still greatly exceeded capacity at the main workhouse. On 12 February there were 1,007 inmates in the House.¹¹ There had been 1,450 on 29 September 1851.¹²

As well as using auxiliary houses, existing workhouse accommodation was being constantly extended during this period. At the time of Mr. Barker's 1861 report (cited above) there seem to have been 39 wards in the Roscrea Workhouse. These varied widely in size, accommodating from 4 (for female probationers) to 77 and 78 (for girls and boys, respectively).

Each occupant was allowed an average of 250-300 cubic feet of ward-space, patients in "Infirm Wards" being allotted 500 cubic feet. There were 12 wards in the infirmary proper, designated "for general hospital purposes." Each of these could cater for 20 people. On this occasion they contained "sick", 99; "dissolute women," 12; and "idiots," 13.

Twenty-two who were considered to have infectious diseases were housed in temporary buildings, the "Fever sheds of (the) ward behind (the) Infirmary." On 14 March 1861 the Poor Law Commissioners in Dublin ordered Roscrea Guardians to limit the numbers "to be maintained in the permanent buildings ... to 985."¹³

For the nightly roll-call inmates were classified as follows: Male; Male infirm; Female; Female infirm; Girls; Boys; Sick; Healthy; Assistants in Hospital; Hospital; Fever Hospital; Penitentiary; Idiots; Probationary, male; Probationary, female; On pass; and Absconders.¹⁴ Any "absconders" who went "over the wall" would probably not have got far, since they were still wearing the workhouse clothing. On admission to a workhouse paupers had their own clothes taken from them to be washed and de-loused; these were then returned to them on leaving!¹⁵



A "Committee to inspect Clothing and other necessaries" was appointed at a meeting in Roscrea on 13 April 1842.¹⁶ It comprised Messrs. Richard Ely, Michael Carroll, Denis Egan, James T. Rolleston and F.A. Jackson. On 22 April they approved of the following items: 150 pairs of men's shoes @ 4s-10d each; do., women's shoes @ 3s-9d (Michael Healy, contractor); 100 pair's of men's socks from Armstrong Hayes, 6p per pair; one potato basket, cost 10s (from John Sweeney); 6 ladles; 100 quart measures and 100 pint measures from David Cotton; 6 milk tubs; 4 oval washing tubs and 14 wine tubs from John Lynch.¹⁷

Wine was used for medicinal purposes as, among other things, a tonic. Other medicines used included diluted prussic acid, hog's lard, Hoffman's anodyne liquor, Belladonna plaster, poor man's plaster, green vitriol, compound rhubarb pill, sugar of lead, saltpetre, extract of deadly nightshade and quicklime.¹⁸ Following the trial and conviction of a Poor Law Union Officer of murder by poisoning, the Commissioners reminded each Board of Guardians that all poisonous medicines should be kept under lock and key, the Medical Officer being responsible.¹⁹

The Medical Officer, whose salary in 1841 was £40 per annum, was one of the most important officers in a Poor Law Union.²⁰ He had to submit a weekly report to the Board of Guardians, including an account of all deaths in the house during the week. There was also a Register of Deaths. The M.O. was responsible for diet and the day-to-day administration of medical care.

In his report to the Roscrea Guardians on 26 March 1851, Paul J. Woods, M.D. informed them that nearly one-third of that week's admissions were cases of dysentery and diarrhoea. (A total of 68 patients had been admitted to the workhouse hospital that week, and 21 to the Brewery Hospital in Abbey St.). Of those who died — 15 in the workhouse, three in the brewery — "More than half... were caused by these two complaints, most of the remainder being admitted in a dying state... (died) of general decay... or as a result of chronic illness."²¹

A Medical Officer was usually assisted by another doctor or doctors, by nurses and a midwife. Mr. William Kingsley, M.D. was physician to the Roscrea Fever Hospital at this time.²² Officers were elected by the Board of Guardians, subject to approval by the Commissioners in Dublin. Complaints against officers were recorded in the minutes of the weekly Board meetings and relayed to the Commissioners, who could direct an Inspector to investigate any charge.

In 1861 the Poor Law Inspector, Mr. Bourke, investigated an allegation "against the Hospital Nurse by a pauper inmate of the workhouse, named Judith C— (for) severe treatment and the use of improper language..." Judith C— had two witnesses on her side, and the M.O. and the Matron were character referees for the Nurse. The Inspector, on "internal evidence" considered the accusation to be "totally groundless." He described the nurse as "a respectable, intelligent, educated woman."

He felt that she could not be guilty of having used the expressions attributed to her, since they were "those used by the most depraved (people), and (were) local in character"! Judith C— was found to be "a person of admitted violence of temper and coarseness of language." After the inquiry, Mr. Bourke had every patient questioned informally by the Master.²³

Apart from the M.O., the Master and Matron were the most important officers in the workhouse. One Roscrea Guardian, Patrick Keshan, was less than happy with the Master's performance in the case of "a Pauper, named Margaret G— whom Keshan considered to be not genuinely deserving of relief at the expense of the ratepayers. According to Keshan, she "had the hardihood to carry on a huckstery in the workhouse for a considerable time until informed on by the late porter...."; she also had "money lodged with the Revd. Mr. Wolfenden, the Protestant Chaplain..."

Furthermore, "she... receives money occasionally from a son... in China, and... the Master and Clerk here are conscious of this since they both read and write her letters..."! Mr. Keshan reminded



the Master that it was his (the Master's) responsibility "to protect (the ratepayers) from useless extravagance." However, the Master, Mr. Hayes, would not disclose details about "what money she had from her son," that being a private matter; as Master, he was responsible for the trust placed in him by the very many illiterate inmates.²⁴

The schoolmaster and schoolmistress were responsible for the education in the workhouse of the boys and girls, respectively. Depending on the size of the workhouse, they would have one or more teachers assisting them for subjects such as embroidery (girls) and agriculture (boys). As Helen Burke has shown, "the majority of workhouse teachers had impossible workloads..."²⁵

Roscrea was no exception. A District Inspector found "62 (pupils) in (the schoolmistress's) sole charge, without even a pauper woman to assist her in keeping order," in the workhouse on 14 May 1862.²⁶ To help reduce overcrowding, the Board of Education suggested to Roscrea Guardians that they establish a separate District school.²⁷

When not in class, older girls helped with housekeeping chores and older boys with gardening and breaking stones. Schooling was supposed to be two-pronged; as well as literacy and numeracy, children were intended to acquire an "industrial" training. In addition to bonuses and prizes for performance, there were other incentives to attract instructors into the workhouse schools. John Conway, a schoolmaster, was awarded half-yearly gratuities of £1 in the early 1860s on the recommendation of the Agricultural Inspectors to the Commissioners of National Education.²⁸ The schoolmaster's salary then was £40 a year.

Poor Law administration was characterised by a plethora of committees. There were Committees for Clothing; as mentioned earlier, there were Finance Committees, Visiting Committees, Dispensary Committees and, on each Board, a group of *ex officio* Guardians. The *ex officio* Guardians appointed at the first meeting of the Roscrea Board (in July 1839) were the Hon. F.A. Prittie, Col. Lloyd and Messrs. M.H. Drought, B. Thacker and M. Andrews. No fewer than 21 Guardians were elected at this meeting.²⁹

The Finance Committee and Visiting Committees were first appointed in May 1842. The Finance Committee was composed of the Hon. F.A. Prittie, Henry Scroope, Wm. Carroll, Thomas Kelly and Denis Egan.³⁰ The Hon. Mr. Prittie, Col. Lloyd, Denis Egan, Frederick A. Jackson, Michael Carroll and Richard Ely constituted the Visiting Committee.³¹ This Committee was to inspect the workhouse at least weekly.

The first formal dispensary system in Ireland was established by the Medical Charities Act of 1851. Dispensary Districts, each with its own M.O., were established in every Poor Law Union. These Districts were to correspond to the already-existing electoral divisions of the Unions.³²

The Electoral Divisions of Roscrea Union, as and from the year 1850, were — (Co. Leix) Kyle; (Co. Offaly) Aghancon, Ballincor, Barna, Cangort, Dunkerrin, Etagh, Gorteen (*sic*), Mountheaton, Shinrone and Templeharry; and (Co. Tipperary) Borrisnafarney, Borrisnoe, Bourney East, Bourney West, Killavinogue, Killea, Roscrea and Timoney. The Divisions of Cullenwaine and Rathnaveogue were split between counties Offaly and Tipperary.³³

Tickets for medical relief could be issued to a pauper by a member of the Dispensary Committee, a Union warden or a relieving officer.³⁴ These officers were frequently challenged by paupers for alleged meanness in carrying out their duties. In one such case a young woman named Ally B— aged "about 19" summoned Thomas H—, the relieving officer of Cullenwaine Electoral Division for "removing her out of the Union Workhouse and for refusing her a ticket of re-admission." George Garvey, Justice of the Peace, heard the complaint.

Ally was "in service". She had to leave work because of "a very sore knee." She was admitted for a fortnight. Thomas H— then told her to leave; she claimed her knee was not better. She got an extra week's stay on the pastor's certificate.



Then, on the instruction of Thomas H—, Ms.B— and her three brothers left the workhouse. They got work for nearly three weeks from a "Scotsman" near Tullamore. No more work being available, Ms B— then returned with her brothers to their native Moneygall. Finding no employment at home, Ally applied for re-admission to Roscrea Workhouse.

The Guardians suggested that she go to "Carden of Barnane." He, however, was not inclined to employ them since, after one week, they still had not found accommodation. Their parents were dead, and they had no home of their own. They were occupying lodgings "partly against the will of the owner," with no "bed or bedding"; for food, they had only "about one stone of potatoes" left. Despite having a letter from the priest addressed to H—, he refused to re-admit Ally.

In his defence H— pointed out that he had acted on instructions from the Guardians and was of the opinion that Ms B— would find employment if she tried hard enough. Mr. Garvey, J.P. said he was not in favour of "ratepayers having to support idleness such as the complainant and her brothers." The B—s had, he remarked, a history of larceny as a result of being in great poverty for several years. Their character was "so much injured" that nobody around Moneygall would employ them.

Dismissing the claimant's case, the J.P. acknowledged that, were she to be totally denied relief, Ally would have no choice but to starve, steal or be punished as a vagrant. He recommended H— to provide Ms B— with relief for a week or so, in the hope that the Guardians might come up with a solution.³⁵

A more serious charge of neglect, resulting in the death of a pauper named James Flanagan, was brought against Thomas S—, relieving officer in Roscrea, in December 1851. The head constable, coroner, surgeon, head nurse and others gave evidence at the inquest, held by Mr. Morgan, J.P.

Head Constable Bourke testified as follows: On Friday the 28th. ult., a poor man... James Flanagan, supposed to be a native of Clare, got lodgings at the house of Mary Kennedy a poor widow residing in this town... (He) remained until 2nd. inst., destitute of any means of support... On Monday, 1st. inst., Mr. Thomas S—, R.O., (was) sent for..."

On his arriving around nine o'clock in the morning, the poor man was in bed unable to get up and... he received the most abusive language from Mr. S, the widow then requested of (S—) to remove (Flanagan) from her house . . but . . he left the house without offering him the smallest relief."

"On the following day, Tuesday, about 2.00 p.m., the poor man, on hearing that the Relieving Officer was in the street, got up . . went. . . asked S— to relieve him, when he (S—) directed him to walk down as far as the bridge . . unable . . he there lay down on the street . . until S— had him conveyed in a car to the Hospital, where he died in the course of the night."

Mary Kennedy of Burgoe (*sic*) gave substantially the same account. After Mass on the Sunday the deceased had complained of "an oppression about his heart," and had been anointed by the priest on Monday morning before Mr. S—'s arrival at her house.

Hanna Peacock, Head Nurse at Roscrea Fever Hospital, also gave evidence. "James Flanagan appeared . . quite exhausted. I gave him up to Nurse Brooks who is in charge of the male wards . . I saw the man again about nine o'clock the same evening . . He was then dying . . (He) died between 8 and 9 o'clock the following morning. He had not been attended by any Medical Officer until 9 p.m. (the day he was admitted)."

Dr. Kingsley attended between 11 and 12 but had left. Dr. Powell visited between 8 and 9 p.m . . said that nothing more could be done for him . . By my directions a plaster was put on his chest immediately after his arrival . . I also ordered white emulsion to ease his chest . . sent him broth but (he was) not able . . (he) had every attention possible..."

The verdict of the inquest was that" . . James Flanagan came by his death . . from an affection of

the chest, accelerated from want of proper medical treatment and want of proper diet, which was refused him by S—, Relieving Officer".³⁶

Any officer who was dismissed by the Commissioners could never again hold office under the Poor Laws. If, however, such an officer had the wit to resign before dismissal, he could re-apply for a Poor Law position at some future date. The Commissioners reprimanded Roscrea Guardians for allowing a nurse in the hospital to escape censure in 1862. The nurse had been "found... under the influence of drink."³⁷ She had promptly tendered her resignation to the Board before they could inform the Commissioners.³⁸

A Board of Guardians had a great deal of paperwork to deal with in the management of the Union. As well as weekly minutes, reports and letters, there was a plethora of forms to be filled in and returned to the Commissioners at regular intervals. When the Board recommended someone to a post as an officer of the Union, the Commissioners forwarded a questionnaire to the Board to be filled up by both the candidate and the clerk of the Union and then returned to the Commissioners.

The Commissioners had also to approve the investiture of Guardians themselves, who were elected locally. In March 1851 they challenged the nomination of Denis E— as Guardian for the Electoral Division of Bournea. W. Stanley, then Secretary to the Commission, pointed out that E— had been convicted under the Insurrection Act in 1823.

In his defence, E— pointed out that his conviction had not been under the correct section and since he had not been found guilty of felony, perjury or fraud, the Commissioners could not block his nomination on these grounds. E— won his case and was declared elected.³⁹

Guardians were elected annually, and the clerk of the Union had to file an annual return of Guardians, officers and officers' salaries and other remuneration's. Along with the annual returns listing the number of paupers in the various departments of the workhouse, the Commissioners often sought additional information: ". . . a Return is required for the information of the Committee on Poor Relief in Ireland, of the Religious Belief of the Paupers in each Union...; also of the religion of the Clerks, Masters, Schoolmasters and Schoolmistresses, and the Medical Officers both of the Workhouse and of the Dispensary Districts."⁴⁰

Special forms were provided by the Commissioners for the making of returns of "the number of Lunatics, Idiots and Epileptics..."⁴¹ Copies of the annual reports of the Poor Law Commissioners were sent separately to the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Deputy Vice-Chairman of each Union. They were to be kept with the other documentary records of the Union.⁴²

Where the Commissioners requested the most detail from the individual Unions was naturally in the area of expenditure. Expenditure forms had to show the following broad divisions of spending; in-maintenance, out-relief, and "all other expenses..."⁴³ Out-relief, or outdoor Relief, represented at last the recognition by the Government, in the wake of the Famine, that workhouse accommodation alone was not enough to meet the ever-increasing needs and numbers of "the destitute poor in Ireland."⁴⁴

As well as seeking details of salaries and emoluments paid to officers, the Commissioners sent forms to the Board of Guardians for quarterly returns of expenses, receipts and liabilities, including debts to contractors, poundage to rate-collectors — 9d. in the £ in 1861.⁴⁵ Returns had to be made of bills for clothing and bedding, medicines, furniture and utensils, repairs and fittings to buildings, and so on.⁴⁶ (A total of £8,296-3s-1d was outstanding on the original Roscrea Workhouse loan in the year ended 29 September 1851).⁴⁷

In addition there were forms for a half-yearly "Abstract Account of Provisions and Necessaries received..." These forms had the following headings: bread, meat, Indian meal, oatmeal, butter, milk, new milk, salt, tea, sugar, flour, rice, pepper, potatoes, vegetables, whiskey, loaf sugar, porter,



eggs, wine, coal, turf, soft soap, hard soap, starch, oil, washing soda, mould candles.⁴⁸

In 1842 Roscrea Workhouse consumed on average each week 1,000 lbs of bread (£6), 130 lbs. of meat (£2), and 550 qts. of new milk (£5). Some 8 lbs. of tea were bought weekly at a cost of £1 2s 8d, 7 lbs of flour costing 1s 1d., and 20 glasses of wine costing 6s. An average of 18s. a week was spent on vegetables, and 2s 6d on oil.

Other items were purchased as required, such as potatoes at £2 for 80st., and whiskey at 16s for 24 glasses. (There were over 100 potato-pits in the grounds of Roscrea Workhouse in 1842.) Other items needed were bed ticks, straw-filled mattresses, rugs, sheeting, bolsters, flannel and linen (*sic*) and night caps.⁴⁹

Advertisements inviting tenders for the supply of goods and services to the workhouse were placed in the local papers. Roscrea Union paid £14 to the *Leinster Express* in April 1842.⁵⁰ Alexander Thom's of Dublin were suppliers of stationery to every Board of Guardians in the country — e.g. minute-books, letter-books, ledgers, receipt books and copy-books.

William Sherlock was the Union's oatmeal contractor in 1842 at £13 8s per. ton.⁵¹ Edward Walsh and Patrick Tierney were awarded the turf contract for 12 months at £3 15s per. 120 statute boxes. Thomas O'Brien charged the Union £5 10s 11d. for 60 cwt. of straw.⁵² A sum of £1 1s 6d was owed to Bryan Murphy & Co. for brass stamps, and 1s 1d to Messrs. Wall for twine.⁵³

Tradesmen employed by the Union included John Lynch, cooper; David Cotton, tinsmith; John Maher, ironsmith; J. McGinnis, barber,⁵⁴ and Thos. Maher, watchmaker.⁵⁵ A sum of 2s 6d was disbursed in June 1842 "for digging a grave for Wm. Taylor," and 1s "for a messenger going for a meal."⁵⁶ John Dann supplied scales and weights to the workhouse.

Daniel Birmingham provided spoons. Worsted was bought from George Hayes and thimbles from F(?) Dudley.⁵⁷ John Maher's proposal was approved for articles of smithwork — hammers, spails (*sic*) shovels, dung-forks and hatchets.⁵⁸

The educational and other conditions of the children, religious tolerance (or otherwise) concerning inmates and staff, and the hardship imposed on the nuclear family, were three of the principal characteristics of early workhouse conditions in this country. The Board of Education's Inspectors seem, on the whole, to have been not too displeased with what they found in the schoolrooms of the Roscrea Workhouse. Descriptions like "adequate" and "satisfactory" abound in their reports.

The living conditions of the children, however, often gave cause for serious concern. Mr. Lynch, Poor Law Inspector, reported in 1851 that children in Roscrea Workhouse were receiving "but two meals a day, (notwithstanding the very strict caution which the Officers of the Workhouse received a few months ago)." He found that the health of the children at the main workhouse compared unfavourably with that of their peers in the Brewery Auxiliary Workhouse in Abbey Street. As a result of this report the Commissioners instructed Roscrea Board to have the two new schoolrooms at the main house boarded.⁵⁹

The original aim of the Irish Poor Law was, to quote Helen Burke, to be "non-sectarian and impartial." As has been noted above, this gave rise to differences of opinion concerning the baptism of orphans and foundlings. A further complication arose in Roscrea in May 1851 involving the re-baptism of a child who had already been baptised in a different religion. It appears that the child in question, on being admitted unaccompanied to the workhouse, was baptised a Protestant, as the law required. Shortly afterwards the child's mother, one Ellen C— admitted herself to the house. Learning that her baby had been baptised a Protestant, she presented herself to Fr. Cleary, the Catholic chaplain, and asked him to re-baptise the child. The Commissioners mildly rebuked Fr. Cleary for acceding too hastily to the mother's request!

While it was (they said) quite in order to re-baptise a child who had been mistakenly baptised

in a different religion, this could be done only on the instructions of the Master or Matron of the House. Fr. Cleary was directed to obtain the express approval of the Master or Matron, and then to re-baptise the child again!⁶⁰

Workhouses were intended to be a refuge only for those who could not otherwise support themselves in any way. Roscrea Guardians felt that a certain Mrs. K—, who sought relief in the workhouse, should not be so accommodated since her husband, from whom she was separated, was in receipt of an Army pension.

Mr. K— had forwarded to the Board a letter he had from the Secretary of War, assuring him that he was not obliged to support his wife on his Army pension, since she was “considered to be of abandoned character.” The Commissioners took the same view as Mr. K— in their communication to the Board.⁶¹ Thus, while the Irish Poor Law undoubtedly caused the break-up of countless families and homes, it also provided a refuge for some who without it would probably have been condemned to a life on the streets.

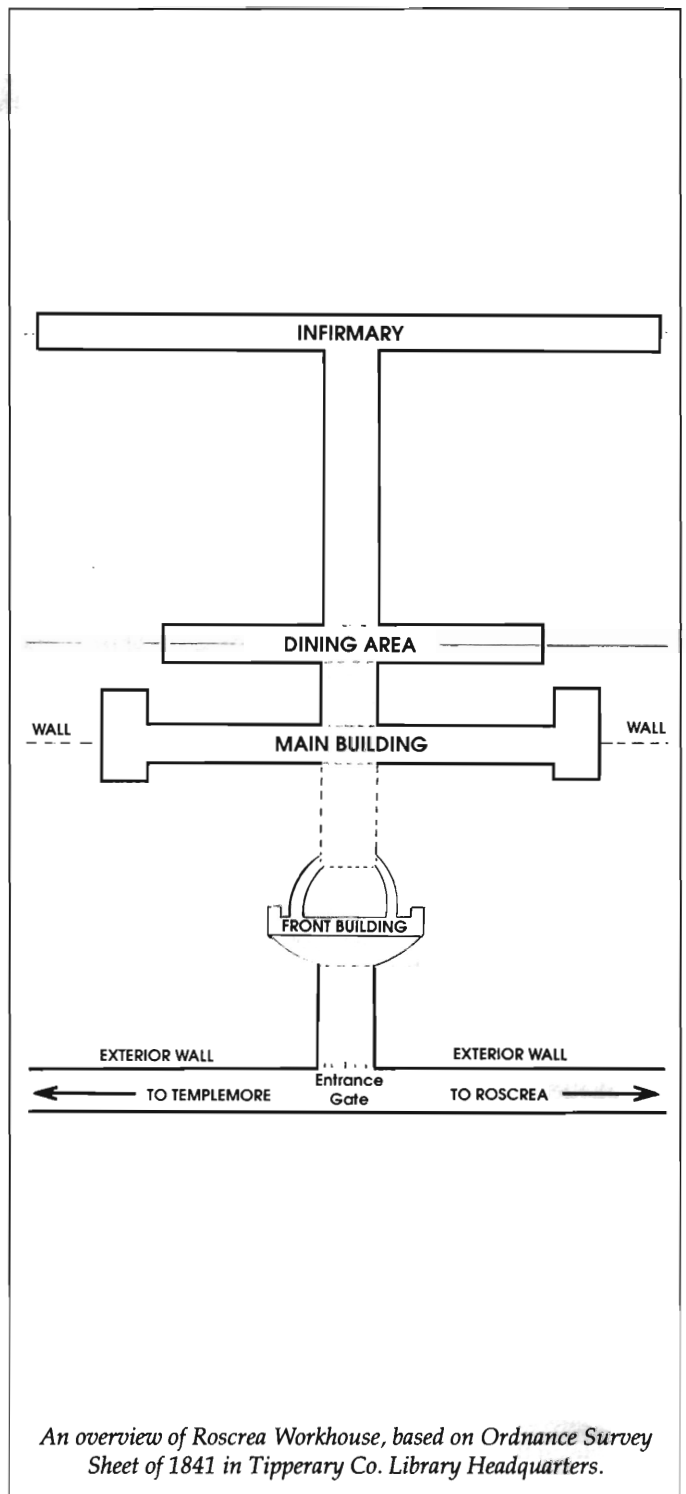
Roscrea Union seems to have weathered the “teething problems” of its first couple of decades fairly well. Its Guardians and officers appear for the most part to have been reliable and honourable people. The inmates, it would appear, were not particularly troublesome. Discipline (and consequently punishment) — notorious in some Unions, especially where children were concerned — do not seem to have been very contentious issues in Roscrea around this time

FOOTNOTES

1. Thanks are due to Mr. Martin Maher, Co. Librarian, and Mrs. Mary Guinan-Darmody, Library Assistant, for their help with sources.
2. Rough Minutes, 3.5.1842.
3. Letters, 6.3.1861.
4. Rough Minutes, 4.9.1842.
5. Letters, 13.5.51.
6. Minutes, 20. 10. 1850.
7. Letters, 13.5.1851.
8. Anne Lanigan; “The Workhouse Child in Thurles,” in *Thurles: The Cathedral Town*; (Dublin, 1989), p.56.
9. Dr. S.C. O’Mahony; “The poor law records of Cos. Clare, Limerick and Tipperary”, in Supplement to *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, Vol. XXI, 1979.
10. Kathleen Moloughney, *Roscrea Me Darlin* (Roscrea, 1987), p.59; also, Letters, 26.3.1851, 19.9.1851.
11. Letters, 12.2.1861.
12. Minutes, Letters, 26.9.1851.
13. Letters, 14.3.1861.
14. Letters, 1861.
15. General Regulations (of Irish Poor Law), quoted in Minutes, 26.9.51.
16. Rough Minutes, 13.4.1842.
17. Do.
18. Letters, 4.7.1862.
19. Letters, 11.8.1862.
20. Rough Minutes, 7.8.1841.
21. Letters, 26.3.1851.
22. Do.
23. Letters, 10.4.1861.
24. Letters, 29.7.1861.
25. Helen Burke, p.204; *The People and the Poor Law in 19th Century Ireland*, 1987 (Wick, Littlehampton, 1987), p.204.



26. Letters from Education Office, 21.5.1862.
27. Do.
28. Letters from Education Office, 4.6.1861.
29. Rough Minutes, 8.8.1839.
30. Rough Minutes, 10.5.1842.
31. Rough Minutes, 17.5.1842.
32. Letters, 12.11.1851.
33. O'Mahony, op.cit.,; also Minutes, 1850; Minutes, 15.11.1851.
34. Burke, op.cit., p.245.
35. Letters, 27.9.1851.
36. Letters, 3.12.1851 to 12.12.1851.
37. Minutes, 17.4.1862; Letters, 23.4.1862.
38. Letters, 3.1851.
39. Letters, 26.5.1851.
40. Letters, 28.3.1861.
41. Letters, 23.6.1851.
42. Letters, 11.10.1851.
43. Burke, op.cit., p.130.
44. Letters, 30.9.1861.
45. Rough Minutes, 31.5.1842.
46. Letters, 25.9.1851.
47. Letters, 12.2.1861.
48. Rough Minutes, 31.5.1842.
49. Rough Minutes, 13.4.1842.
50. Rough Minutes, do.
51. Rough Minutes, 26.4.1842.
52. Rough Minutes, 10.5.1842.
53. Rough Minutes, 10.5.1842.
54. Rough Minutes, 24.5.1842.
55. Rough Minutes, 31.5.1842.
56. Rough Minutes, 14.6.1842.
57. Rough Minutes, 31.5.1842.
58. Rough Minutes, 22.3.1842.
59. Letters from the Education Office, 7.8.1851.
60. Letters, 29.5.1851 and 2.6.1851.
61. Letters from War Office and Letters, Poor Law Commission Office, 2.1851, and 3.1851.



An overview of Roscrea Workhouse, based on Ordnance Survey Sheet of 1841 in Tipperary Co. Library Headquarters.