

'He shall have care of the garden, its cultivation and produce': Workhouse Gardens and Gardening, c.1780-1835

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Abstract: Where productive workhouse gardens and land existed they comprised an essential aspect of institutional management, yet they feature only briefly in accounts of workhouses and inmates' lives. Their location, desirability and benefits, however, occupied the minds of parish officials, doctors, Enlightenment thinkers and pamphleteers. Workhouse gardens provided food and were regarded as mechanisms for discipline, moral encouragement and therapeutic benefit, and they illustrate the management of pauperism in local contexts. Eliciting a greater understanding of their significance and refining established assumptions about dietary provision for inmates, this article analyses itemised bills, nurserymen's ledgers and attitudes surrounding workhouse gardens and workhouse land.

Keywords: Lichfield, Liverpool, Uttoxeter, overseers' vouchers, landscaped grounds, seeds, plants and vegetables

In 1829 John Claudius Loudon (1783-1843) declared:

Let a source of agreeable and productive labour, such as large gardens, be found for the inmates of our workhouses, and let efficient gardeners be set over them, and we have no doubt the poor in many parishes would nearly, or wholly support themselves.¹

This optimism was tempered by Loudon's belief that, so long as parish vestries were composed of ignorant men governed by their own interests, such provision would remain limited. His views encapsulate in microcosm some of the complex issues faced by those responsible for workhouse inmates, including dietary provision, gainful employment, financial control and critical external scrutiny.

Workhouse gardens and land feature rarely in horticultural historiography. Instead, movements, styles, landscapers, patrons and estate development dominate the literature. The survival of plans and planting schemes by leading designers, estate accounts, correspondence, travel literature, nursery catalogues and ledgers, and, most potently, the survival of historic estate gardens, provide a wide range of source material.² Research on pleasure gardens as artistic and social spaces, on municipal parks, allotments and cottage gardens, and on the therapeutic benefits of hospital and asylum gardens has made its mark, but workhouse gardens have yet to receive such attention.³ Despite being a feature of workhouses under the old poor law, little is known about them.⁴ Archive material is fragmented; their physical survival (excluding reconstructions) is rare; and the focus of scholarly research on workhouses is on their design and construction, the impact of regulatory changes, inmates' lives and changing approaches to treatment.⁵ In these accounts gardens are acknowledged but rarely elaborated on, even though attempts to make the poor self-sustaining had been an obsession across western Europe for over two hundred years.

Beyond potatoes, cabbages, beans and onions, what types of vegetables were eaten by paupers, in what quantities and with what regularity, remains unclear.⁶ Attempting to

determine the calorific intake of workhouse occupants and overcome the deficiencies of workhouse dietaries (which often omitted staples such as soups and stews), Alannah Tomkins advocates the use of overseers' accounts of meat, grains and groceries, combined with lists of inmates.⁷ Even with these, brief descriptions make interpretation difficult; at Darlaston, Staffordshire, accounts record plant purchases without specifying the type or quantity.⁸ Using accounts for St Martin-in-the-Fields workhouse, Boulton and Davenport note that food and drink, including vegetables, accounted for 6.4 per cent of all expenditure between 1725 and 1739.⁹ Such research gets closer to understanding inmates' diets, but summary accounts alone make it almost impossible to determine fully the types and quantities of vegetables and groceries consumed, especially as the purchase of the latter often included non-food items. Moreover, they take little account of what was grown on workhouse land. Overseers' vouchers and nurserymen's ledgers present alternative points of entry.

Under the old poor law parishes provided food, clothes, housing and medical care for the 'deserving poor': the very young, sick, infirm and old. They supported the unemployed and those with incomes insufficient to maintain their dependants. This generated a huge amount of paperwork from goods and service providers in the form of bills or overseers' vouchers. Their sheer volume has eluded scholarly investigation, but through the AHRC-funded 'Small Bills and Petty Finance' project their rich detail is establishing a newly granular model of the old poor law at the point of intersection between ratepayers, parish officials and paupers. Vouchers relating to gardens are used here to establish the range of vegetables grown in workhouses and to indicate the extent to which inmates had access to them across the year.¹⁰ This adds to current scholarship on workhouse diets by eliciting a greater appreciation of changing foodways and the extent to which inmates shared in changing consumption patterns. Without knowing crop yields from individual gardens, without detailed lists of inmates, their individual circumstances and consumption patterns, and without knowing the extent to which garden produce was sold, however, it is not possible to determine the amount of vegetables consumed by an individual, or to determine the full nutritional component of vegetables in pauper diets.

Following an overview of the number and distribution of workhouse gardens, this article explores attitudes to the provision of land for the poor and workhouse gardens through contemporary pamphlets, gardening manuals and parliamentary reports. Based on overseers' vouchers, case studies of workhouse gardens in Lichfield and Uttoxeter in Staffordshire analyse the range of crops grown and the implications this has for understanding inmates' diets. The ornamental landscaping surrounding Liverpool workhouse provides a useful counterpoint. Drawing on the ledgers of nurserymen Caldwell and Sons of Knutsford, Cheshire, which included Liverpool workhouse among its customers, enables comparisons to be made between the purchasing strategies of workhouses, landed estates and middle-ranking individuals.¹¹ This embeds workhouse gardens within broader horticultural practices. Collectively, the examples illustrate the challenges of turning contemporary discussion on workhouse land into practical and workable realities: namely, marrying individual industry with institutional economy within a framework of Enlightenment ideas of moral therapy and improvement.

I. Number, Size and Distribution of Workhouse Gardens and Land

Productive gardens were integral features of poor law administration, although not all parishes had workhouses and not all workhouses had productive land. Early

nineteenth-century England and Wales contained around 15,000 parishes. In 1804 parliament reported that 14,106 of them had responded to enquiries regarding the poor.¹² Out of 3,765 workhouses and 1,057 places maintained under contract or by acts of parliament, only 15 returns made specific reference to a garden, farm or land. Three decades later, the 1832 royal commission into the poor laws saw a response rate of around 10 per cent: 1,200 rural parishes and 380 urban parishes.¹³ In the resulting report, 109 parishes declared that they had some form of land associated with a workhouse.¹⁴ Overwhelmingly, this was gardens (in 105 cases), but some also included pasture, arable land, potato fields and farms.

The 1834 report noted productive workhouse land in around half the counties of England and Wales, although distribution was uneven: twenty in Yorkshire; sixteen in Middlesex; eleven in West Sussex; ten in Nottinghamshire; five in Hampshire; four each in Huntingdonshire and Lincolnshire; three each in Lancashire, Kent, Shropshire and Suffolk; two each in Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Cumberland, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire; and one each in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Dorset, East Sussex, Essex, Montgomeryshire, Warwickshire and Westmorland. The reports, however, under-represent the number of workhouses with land: only Keswick and Penrith are noted for Cumberland, but gardens also existed at Brampton, Dalston and Wigton.¹⁵ Staffordshire's gardens are not mentioned in the 1834 report, yet in the county's forty parishes with surviving vouchers, thirteen had workhouses and of those at least seven had gardens: Darlaston; Gnosall; Haughton; St Mary's, Lichfield; Tettenhall; Uttoxeter; and Wednesbury. Similarly, by identifying the existence of fifty-four parish farms in the counties of Berkshire, Hampshire, Kent, Sussex and Wiltshire between 1793 and 1832, Griffin's research also highlights the under-representation of workhouse land in poor law reports.¹⁶ What the reports do reveal, however, is that productive land varied in extent and was not proportionate to the number of inmates in individual workhouses. In Richmond, Surrey, the 148 inmates enjoyed produce from its 41 acres, 24 of which were farmland.¹⁷ In 1834, for forty inmates, Great Ouseburn, Yorkshire, had just three roods (three-quarters of an acre) of garden, 'kept in very good order by the paupers'.¹⁸ Gedling, Nottinghamshire, had a 1½ acre garden and 53 inmates, compared with Bedford's 22 acres including pasture, for 104 inmates.¹⁹ The differing sizes of workhouse gardens reflected contrasting attitudes to their very existence and to the availability of land.

II. *Attitudes to Land for the Poor*

Cast within the wider debate concerning land provision for the labouring poor, recommendations regarding new workhouses, hospitals and asylums and the desirability of gardens proliferated in the late eighteenth century. Discussion was fuelled by the combined impacts of war with France, the disruption of trade and poor harvests. By encouraging husbandry skills, it was argued, the labouring poor would become self-reliant and more industrious, increase output and contribute to national stability during times of unrest.²⁰ Enabling labourers to produce their own food contributed to family health and reduced dependence on poor relief. Cottage gardens, potato fields, smallholdings, pastures and allotments were also deemed useful for instilling discipline, for moral encouragement and for therapeutic purposes.²¹ Thomas Bernard stated:

The cottager, who has a garden [...] has always before him a pleasurable object of industry for his leisure time: whereas he who has none, is driven to the alehouse by the same unhappy necessity that impels young men to the gaming table – the want of occupation.²²

Two long-standing tropes can be discerned threading their way through these attitudes: a belief in the ability of the poor to labour, and the idea that labouring men should support their families.²³ As Jeremy Burchardt observes, however, attributing individual levels of significance to these factors is problematic.²⁴ Their intertwined nature was apparent to contemporaries. William Stevens of Cowley, Middlesex, stated: 'Allotments of land under spade cultivation strike me as the most beneficial to the interest of the country, tending to tranquilise the mind of the poor unemployed and affording his food by his own industry and family's at a cheap rate.'²⁵ Edward Ossler believed in the dual combination of economy and morality bestowed by giving land to the poor: parish rates would be diminished while the land itself would 'establish domestic and industrious habits in the rising generation [...] In all our plans for bettering the condition of the poor, moral considerations must ever hold first place.'²⁶ Not all agreed. Objections to a provision within the Select Vestries Act (1817) enabling parishes to acquire land for this purpose meant that it was rarely taken up.²⁷ While commending the provision, the Revd T. C. Fell and Edward Riley of Sheepy Magna, Leicestershire, questioned the integrity of those for whom it was designed to benefit: 'Mr Sturges Bourne is always employed in kind endeavours, [...] but [...] the dishonesty of the Labourers will turn the garden plan into evil'.²⁸ Where parishes did provide land (Carl Griffin's research suggests that more parishes adopted this policy than Burchardt was aware of), the effects were generally thought to be positive.²⁹ In 1833 Alrewas vestry (Staffordshire) provided allotments for 56 families and in 1835 reported that the trial 'continues to work exceedingly well, and much to the benefit of the occupiers', before noting 'two cases of delinquency against the Allotment regulations', which resulted in the occupants being deprived of their allocation of land.³⁰

On workhouses, pamphleteers, drawing heavily on natural and moral philosophy to validate their financially driven arguments, stressed the need to move existing establishments out of overcrowded, cramped urban spaces to peripheral locations where land was cheaper and more plentiful. The title of Robert Saunders's *Observations on the Present State and Influence of the Poor Laws; Founded on Experience; and a Plan, Proposed for the Consideration of Parliament: by which the Affairs of the Poor may in Future be Better Regulated; Their Morals, and Habits of Industry, Greatly Improved; and a Considerable Reduction in the Poores' Rates Effected*, summarises the contemporary attitude of many.³¹ Mason Good also thought workhouses should be situated in suburbs:

in an open and elevated spot, where the water is plentiful and pure [...] The whole should be enclosed for a pasture ground and garden. The latter may be cultivated by the labour of two or three of the resident paupers [...] Its produce will diminish the expense of every meal, and contribute towards the general health of the family.³²

Mason Good (who recognised the limited employment opportunities afforded by gardens) believed the amount of vegetables should be increased primarily to decrease costs. Animal food should be 'regularly exchanged in the pauper diet for [...] potatoes, or whatever other vegetables, may be acquired at the lowest price, or raised in abundance, in the garden belonging to the house'.³³ *The Friendly Design, Containing a Variety of Plans for the Benefit of the Rich, and the Comfort of the Poor* included proposals for a new workhouse in

Birmingham in 1800. Economic, health and moral imperatives are clearly evident: 'The idea of cooping up, within high walls, in the midst of a large town, a promiscuous multitude of old and young, sick and well, sane and insane; serious, sedate, and religious; profane, wanton and blasphemous beings [...] is [...] most shocking.'³⁴ Similarly to Mason Good, the author recommended building a new poor house 'in some healthful situation a little way in the country', where inmates would benefit from 'country air' and where male inmates might 'be sent to work in the parish garden ground, and a proper overseer or director, no doubt, would make them get more than their maintenance was worth'.³⁵ Key Hill would make:

an admirably pleasant garden (in which the aged, and infirm poor, might always be permitted to amuse themselves) [...] The principal part of it might be planted occasionally with potatoes, and different sorts of garden-stuff, for the use of the aged poor's house, the asylum and the soup shops.³⁶

A space in which inmates might 'amuse themselves' and breathe country air denotes workhouse gardens having functions in addition to augmenting diets and reducing costs. Those unable to contribute physically could still benefit from them – a theme taken up later by Loudon:

If, instead of being placed upon benches, with nothing to gaze at but a brick wall, these persons were led into a garden, where they could see numbers of their fellow inmates at work, breathe the fresh air, see and smell the flowers, and hear the birds [...] their miserable lot would have some little alleviation.³⁷

Similar to asylum gardens, it was anticipated that those attached to workhouses would function as spaces in which widely accepted norms and modes of behaviour could be imposed on inmates. Society expected order, discipline, self-restraint and industry, not idleness, believed by many to be the cause of poverty and immorality. Separating men and women in terms of the work they were expected to perform, however inadequately enforced in reality, was thought to reduce the risk of promiscuity, and moral contagion.³⁸ Consequently, the employment of male workhouse inmates in horticultural activity was the norm. At Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, men were employed in 'the care of the garden', and at Dartford, Kent, 'Those men that are able cultivate the garden'.³⁹ On the rare occasion where women were employed in workhouse gardens (usually weeding), their activity reinforced the allegedly subsidiary, supporting and separate roles of women in agriculture.⁴⁰

As it appeared to offer a single solution to the multiple problems of feeding paupers at low cost, reducing ratepayers' financial burdens, providing gainful employment and producing a profit, it is not surprising that parish authorities turned to the idea of productive land. Buoyed by contemporary arguments, in 1829 Loudon asked if every parish should be obliged to have a workhouse garden: the produce 'would, in great part, be consumed by the poor themselves, and the remainder might be sold'.⁴¹ Parishes achieving cost reductions as a result were widely admired, yet attempts to emulate them often failed. The reality was that, while workhouses were regarded as necessary for the most vulnerable in society, compared with outdoor relief they were expensive to build, operate and maintain. Although not universal, as caring for vulnerable inmates incurred additional costs for medical care, food and fuel, or schooling, expenditure on indoor relief per person was around four times that of outdoor relief.⁴² Many schemes aimed at cost reduction were economically naive and methods of accounting inadequate.⁴³ Loudon, for example, proposed one acre for every four people a workhouse could house.⁴⁴ This may have derived from a statute from 1589 (rarely implemented and repealed in 1775) designed to

encourage subsistence among the labouring sort by declaring cottages built without four acres of land illegal.⁴⁵ If implemented, Liverpool's workhouse (population c.1,200) would have required 300 acres. Moreover, not recognising that many people dipped in and out of urban workhouses, re-siting them to the countryside rather than to the peripheries of towns removed paupers to places where, with fewer contacts, it was harder for them to find employment and consequently leave the institutions.⁴⁶

Alongside their desirability as a means of cost reduction, proponents of workhouse gardens focused on the employment opportunities they offered. Martin William, assistant overseer of Penzance, Cornwall, declared: 'The best mode of compelling the cottager to industry we take to be, obliging every parish to have a workhouse with garden and grounds surrounded by walls.'⁴⁷ It was envisaged that as a natural extension of providing for families, able-bodied paupers would toil in gardens for deserving inmates.⁴⁸ With expectations of what masters, matrons and paupers were capable of diverging from what occurred, the reality was frequently very different. Many parishes denied admittance to the able-bodied. Consequently, most inmates were simply too infirm to make any meaningful work-related contributions towards their own maintenance. In Yorkshire, Aldborough's garden was cultivated 'by paupers when able, and at other times by paid labour'.⁴⁹ Furthermore, while gardens could and did produce vegetables sufficient to supply the needs of workhouses, by highlighting the limited employment opportunities they offered, the poor law report of 1834 counteracted Loudon's view that 'A good large garden [...] would always supply an abundance of work'.⁵⁰ At Penrith only one of the workhouse's sixty-two inmates was engaged in gardening.⁵¹

Limited employment opportunities for the able-bodied did not preclude some parochial officers from requiring those running workhouses to create and maintain gardens as demonstrations of their fitness to govern. In 1804 a Mr Edye noted that, aside from manufacturing and domestic duties, the able-bodied of Montgomery's workhouse (average 244 inmates) were employed on the house's 172 acres of garden, farm, woodland, meadow and pasture, but having the right manager was essential:

Our Farm is the best we could procure sufficiently near the House, and our Steward happens to have a good knowledge of Agriculture and is said to manage it well; but should we change this Officer, I should strongly recommend that our Tillage be lessened.⁵²

The issue of whether parish officials had the necessary time or skill to manage schemes appropriately was raised by several contributors to the poor law reports.⁵³ At St Mary's, Reading,

A piece of ground was taken for a garden to supply the poorhouse, but was given up, the wages paid for the work done making it too expensive. This arises from the master of the poorhouse not being able to give that vigilant attention such an undertaking requires, his other avocations taking him away.⁵⁴

III. Managing the Workhouse Garden

Given the overarching desire to reduce expenditure on poor relief, contemporary pamphleteers were curiously quiet about the costs incurred in establishing and maintaining gardens. Without explaining how it was to be achieved, the master and matron of Darlaston, Staffordshire, were to 'see that the garden be properly cultivated for the use

of the house'.⁵⁵ Similarly, at Uley, Gloucestershire, the master was to 'have care of the garden, its cultivation and produce'.⁵⁶ This required more than plant and seed purchases. Enclosing gardens involved considerable time and expense. In 1783 at Gnosall, Staffordshire, 30,000 bricks costing £19 17s. 8d. were used 'to build a wall around the workhouse garden'; the following year a further £43 15s. was paid for bricks and lime, the carriage of stone and bricks, blacksmith's work and timber boards for the 'wall round the Garden'.⁵⁷ Walled gardens were necessary to create microclimates for plants but were also an attempt, although not always a successful one, to reduce theft. Benjamin Woodcock's diary records thefts of potatoes from the clamp used to store them over winter, and occasionally the illegal pulling up and removing of cabbages and potatoes.⁵⁸ Once enclosed, ground needed to be levelled and drained, as at Uttoxeter, and replenished with dung, as at Lichfield, where Charles Houldcroft delivered three tons of manure.⁵⁹ Tools needed to be procured, and maintained. In Lichfield, William Taylor supplied the workhouse with a spade, axe and garden hoe.⁶⁰ James Barnes, Samuel Gregory and Henry Kent were each paid for wheelbarrow repairs.⁶¹ Sometimes gardeners or labourers were engaged, as at Lichfield: Richard Gillard in 1822, James Gothridge from 1823 to 1826 and William Billins in 1835.⁶² Additional expenses at East Retford, Nottinghamshire, and at St Mary Le Strand, Westminster, included beer allowances for garden labourers.⁶³ Where workhouses had no suitable land, and none could be obtained through enclosure, renting became an option. Lichfield paid a half-yearly rent of 10s. 6d. for 'a garden for the poorhouse'; modest in comparison with the £50 paid annually in Southampton.⁶⁴ Often held on short leases, vestries had to weigh up the cost of transforming the land into viable kitchen gardens against the possibility that leases would not be renewed, or that the outlay exceeded the value of the food produced.

Despite the expense, however, productive gardens could be valuable assets.⁶⁵ Some were quasi-commercial concerns with surplus vegetables sold in local markets. In 1789 Keswick's workhouse garden was 'cultivated by the poor, who in return are supplied with vegetables from it [...] A large quantity of vegetables are every year sold out of it, and the money applied towards the maintenance of the house.'⁶⁶ Basford's workhouse inmates cultivated 24 acres. Its proximity to Nottingham, where the governor was known as a market gardener, afforded a 'convenient and certain market for the produce'. In October 1831 one week's produce fetched £22 3s. 9d.⁶⁷ In Surrey, stocking and managing Richmond's 24 acre farm in 1802-3 cost £100 2s. 6d. Produce included wheat valued at £124 10s., oats at £18, peas at £10 10s. and potatoes at £26 5s. In total, the farm made an exceptional profit of £181 15s. 6d. As far as the overseers were concerned, 'Two material objects have been gained (at least to the poor) plenty of vegetables and plenty of milk'.⁶⁸ In Uttoxeter produce sales in 1826-7 amounted to £4 1s. 3d. and in 1831 to £11 10s. 9d., suggesting that such sales were due to a genuine surfeit rather than a deliberate attempt to control costs further.⁶⁹ These examples, however, cannot be taken as evidence of contemporary unanimity on the subject of workhouse gardens; sometimes there were countervailing pressures, and in reality complete self-sufficiency, large-scale cost-savings or profits rarely materialised. To its critics – typified by Thomas Battye's excoriating *A Disclosure of Parochial Abuse, Artifice, & Peculation*, detailing the wastefulness and 'very heavy and accumulating burthens' Bridge Street workhouse (opened 1793) placed on Manchester's inhabitants – the operation of the poor law was characterised by inefficiency.⁷⁰ Anything that increased the financial burdens of ratepayers, such as gardens, which required initial investment and ongoing expense, was to be resisted. Even where implemented, some parishes found the expense or effort not worthwhile and organisation difficult. At Southampton garden produce consumed in the house, was valued at about £35: £15 less than the rent of the land on

which it was grown.⁷¹ Leeds workhouse had no land; 20 acres were 'taken at Knostrop some years ago but it did not answer. Mr Baines supposes for want of good management.'⁷² In 1793 the inhabitants of Wigton, Cumberland, were called to a meeting 'in order to consent for or against selling and conveying the Poorhouse Garden'.⁷³ Following a unanimous decision, the garden was sold. As Griffin found for parish farms, workhouse gardens were 'susceptible to being abandoned for a lower cost alternative'.⁷⁴

IV. *Workhouse Gardening in Staffordshire*

The 'complex and contingent' nature of workhouse dietaries means that no attempt will be made here to establish the quantity of vegetables consumed by workhouse inmates.⁷⁵ As the number of occasions in a typical week when vegetables were served is generally unknown and some workhouses permitted inmates to eat as many as they wished, generalisations are hazardous.⁷⁶ The issue is complicated further because home-grown vegetables supplemented bought-in produce, and in Lichfield poor grain harvests resulted in changes to the workhouse dietary to include more vegetables.⁷⁷ Establishing the variety of vegetables grown in workhouse gardens through overseers' vouchers, however, is more straightforward.

Garden produce contributed significantly to workhouse fare in Uttoxeter and Lichfield. Early nineteenth-century Uttoxeter was a moderately affluent market town with a population approaching 5,000. Its chief sources of income were derived from agriculture: timber, cheese-making, brewing and tanning. A new workhouse on The Heath (1789) in an open and slightly elevated situation (thereby reflecting contemporary thinking on institutional locations) had an attached brickyard and a 1½ acre garden employing parish paupers.⁷⁸ Accommodating fifty people on average, inmates included able-bodied adults, the infirm, children and 'idiots'.⁷⁹ Between 1824 and 1837 Uttoxeter's overseers received over fifty bills relating to the workhouse garden. Of these, eighteen refer to seeds and plants, with the remainder for the purchase of dung and archangel mats, and to the purchase or repair of watering cans, spades, trowels and wheelbarrows.⁸⁰ Although newspapers available in Uttoxeter contained adverts from nurserymen John Cormark and Son of London, Uttoxeter's overseers, like those elsewhere, wished to recirculate money collected as part of the poor rate within the local economy.⁸¹ All the garden-related bills came from Uttoxeter-based seedsmen: George Foster, John Gee, William Rogers, John Smith and Robert Brassington.⁸² With a variety of suppliers from whom overseers could choose supplies, the seedsmen were keenly aware that continued business depended on their ability to meet orders in a timely fashion, with quality seeds and plants at competitive, standardised prices.

What proportion of an individual seedsman's income was derived from the workhouse is unknown but, in a credit-dependent age, such contact helped to sustain their respective businesses. Indeed, William Rogers was a second-generation supplier: in 1769 his father, Henry, had supplied potatoes and kidney beans.⁸³ Purchased either in the form of seeds or young plants, celery, Savoy cabbages, radishes, lettuces, Windsor beans, turnips, peas, Prussian and marrowfat peas, onions, leeks, cauliflowers, broccoli, swede, Welsh onions, green beans, carrots, spinach and parsley dominate the vouchers. George Foster's representative bill for beans, onion, radish, leek, lettuce, parsley and cabbage shows two orders placed in March 1830, four in June and one each in July, August and December.⁸⁴ Purchasing patterns indicate the use of seasonal crops and strategies to extend the growing season with early, late and heavy-cropping varieties such as Prussian peas, long-pod and

early beans and spinach grown as a temporary crop between peas, beans, cauliflowers and broccoli.⁸⁵ By staggering the purchase of seeds and plants and consequently planting times, a range of fresh vegetables could be made available for much of the year.

The vouchers demonstrate that the garden was managed by someone with a good knowledge of kitchen gardens, vegetable varieties, planting times and methods of cultivation. Perhaps, like Tewkesbury (Gloucestershire), Uttoxeter divided specified aspects of workhouse superintendence among parochial officers, with one gardener attending to the business of the garden and overseeing the disposal of the produce.⁸⁶ This practical approach to garden management is significant. The transient stays, variable numbers and different skill-sets of able-bodied inmates may sometimes have led to disrupted working practices. This occurred in 1832 at the Isle of Wight's workhouse, which housed 667 inmates. Despite this number, and the fact that 'such men, resident in the house as can work are employed in the garden', it was noted that 'At present there are scarcely any men of this description'.⁸⁷ Uttoxeter's overseers' accounts provide evidence of the changing numbers, ages and physical condition of inmates. In March 1830 the 56 inmates comprised 6 male labourers and scavengers, 2 female kitchen workers, 11 infirm men and 10 infirm women, 16 children and 6 'idiots'.⁸⁸ In March 1831, of the 44 inmates, 8 were male labourers and scavengers, and in 1832, the 44 inmates included 12 male labourers and scavengers.⁸⁹ Shifting numbers resulting in potentially disrupted working practices could be compounded by other tasks demanded of the able-bodied at Uttoxeter, including brick-making. Disruption may not have been unduly onerous, however. The limited employment opportunities offered by workhouse gardens, and the husbandry skills many paupers had, tempered potential disruption.

Lichfield was the spiritual and administrative centre of the diocese of Lichfield and Coventry. A range of amenities was available to the population of 6,360: almshouses, charitable hospitals, a guildhall, theatre, markets, a boys' grammar school, dispensary, lunatic asylum and a girls' school of industry.⁹⁰ Attempts to bring poor relief administration in Lichfield's parishes into closer alignment were unsuccessful. Although wider fiscal difficulties were prevalent, as implementing any changes would fall on 'financially wary small ratepayers', they probably mattered less than local circumstances.⁹¹ Indeed, in 1777 St Chad's vestry refused to join a union with St Mary's or to contribute towards its poor. The result was a small city with three workhouses: St Mary's (accommodating around 40 paupers), St Chad's and St Michael's.⁹²

Nurserymen Joseph Sedgwick, of Bore Street, and Thomas Clerk, of Market Street, were the principal suppliers to St Mary's between 1823 and 1832.⁹³ Clerk's 2½ acre nursery was situated south of the city, off Upper St John Street; he also constructed forcing houses, created lawns, parks, plantations and pleasure grounds.⁹⁴ As at Uttoxeter, Sedgwick and Clerk supplied the workhouse with mustard, cress, radish, onion, lettuce, cabbage, Savoy cabbage, cauliflower, spinach, parsley, leeks, Windsor and long-pod beans, Altrincham carrots, Prussian and imperial peas, celery, turnip, early turnip and Cockney potatoes, an early-cropping variety.⁹⁵ Itemising specific varieties such as Altrincham carrots and Cockney potatoes is not surprising: Lichfield was known for its market gardening.⁹⁶ Not all local nurserymen were commissioned by parish officials; aside from Clerk and Sedgwick, more than thirty others resided in Lichfield.⁹⁷ Nurserymen not listed in directories also supplied the workhouse. In 1826 James Bird provided 'Potatoes for the workhouse garden' with the money received by Elizabeth Bird.⁹⁸ Similarly, Maria Sedgwick signed a receipt on behalf of her husband, Joseph, when he supplied a quart of peas, three pints of beans, onion and 'different small seeds'.⁹⁹ George Sandford supplied 150 celery plants, and Samuel Jackson provided lettuce, beans, onion, carrot, radish and mustard.¹⁰⁰

The date between the last item recorded on a bill and the account being settled was usually relatively short. In an age when six to twelve months' credit was common, the settlements, always in full and in cash, may have helped to sustain these enterprises against slow- or part-payers and bad debtors.¹⁰¹ Of four surviving bills submitted by Clerk between 1823 and 1826 three were settled within eight weeks; the fourth took nine months.¹⁰² Although the regular contact nurserymen had with poor law officials could be regarded as an important aspect of their businesses (Clerk's bill of 1825 shows that purchases were made on seven separate occasions between 9 March and 17 May), conferring respectability and status, Brown's work on suppliers to London's workhouses illustrates that many saw low returns.¹⁰³ This is also borne out by the Lichfield and Uttoxeter bills. Assuming that the surviving vouchers are reasonable reflections of the original numbers submitted in each parish (1,611 survive for St Mary's between 1821 and 1829), Clerk's bills (1823-6) totalled £1 8s. 7d. while, in Uttoxeter, William Roger's eight bills (1824-36) totalled a more substantial but still modest £11 8s. 2d.¹⁰⁴ While some gardeners, such as George Willdey of Lichfield, supplied both seeds and fresh vegetables, modest monetary expenditure by workhouses on seeds and plants in comparison to fresh produce countered potential opposition to self-provisioning from other local suppliers. In the year ending March 1832 Sheffield spent £1 5s. 10d. on garden seeds, but £52 17s. 1d. on fresh vegetables.¹⁰⁵

Evidence from Uttoxeter and Lichfield shows that workhouse gardens produced a wider range of vegetables and a greater number of varieties than previously recognised, but cost-effectiveness (based on maximum yield and rolling harvesting times) was not always the overriding factor when purchasing seeds and plants. What vegetables tasted like and how they were to be used were also taken into consideration. This becomes evident when comparing the contents of itemised vouchers and contemporary gardening advice with local custom and consumption practices. Loudon's *Gardening Encyclopaedia* shows that while some vegetable varieties produced early, late or particularly abundant crops or had long growing seasons, others were held in high esteem for their flavour. Grown at both Lichfield and Uttoxeter, long-pod beans were heavy-croppers, whereas Windsor beans, despite their long growing seasons, were 'not accounted liberal bearers'. Although they could be used in soups, their flavour resulted in them being 'preferred for the table [...] in dishes apart'. Boiled cauliflower, broccoli and Savoy were also commonly served as vegetable dishes in winter and spring.¹⁰⁶ All were regular purchases for Uttoxeter workhouse. In June 1830 George Foster supplied 80 cauliflower plants, 80 broccoli plants and 380 Savoy cabbage plants.¹⁰⁷ Boiled and mashed turnips and carrots were served separately in dishes, or in broths, soups and stews. Marrowfat and Prussian blue peas were known for their fine flavour, the latter also esteemed as 'great bearers' and 'fine eating peas'. Early-cropping frame peas could be grown without the assistance of heat (there is no evidence of glasshouses or cold frames at either Lichfield or Uttoxeter) but were low bearers. Radishes, eaten raw year-round, and the leaves, mixed with mustard and cress, were presented as 'small salad', and the seeds, when plump, were used 'to increase the variety of vegetable pickles'. 'Kidney beans' appear often in the vouchers. Loudon is clear that these are haricot or runner beans. Successive crops, grown between June and October, were 'particularly useful in times of scarcity' and in dry seasons, when they would flourish. Spinach was used in soups, or 'boiled alone, and mashed and served up with gravies'. Other than in salads, young onions were used in soups and stews. Blanched leeks were 'much esteemed', but in the context of workhouses were more likely to have been ingredients in soups, stews and porridge-like dishes. By successive sowings from spring to autumn, lettuce was available for much of the year, and was used in soups, as were

turnips and cabbages. Celery was eaten raw in salads and, from August to March, stewed and put in soups. Prussian and marrowfat peas, best sown from February until June, were also good late crops, whereas Windsor beans, sown from March until June, were a good summer crop. Peas and kidney beans taken up by the end of October were replaced by winter greens.¹⁰⁸

Loudon's comments were based on the ways vegetables were commonly eaten among the general populace. Tangential evidence suggests that inmates also consumed vegetables in a similar manner. Samuel Bamford recalled the 'spacious kitchen with two large boilers and other apparatus for cooking' at Salford workhouse.¹⁰⁹ The cleaving, chopping and carving knives, ladles, scales, frying pans, saucepans, colanders, rolling pins, kettles and sieves at Uttoxeter – together with the boilers, measuring and cooking pots, kettles, skillets, toasting forks, baking, frying pans and saucepans and kitchen ranges in other workhouses – show that vegetables could be prepared and consumed in raw, roasted or boiled formats, or preserved and pickled with the salt, spices, sugar or vinegar frequently found in grocers' bills.¹¹⁰

Taking the seeds and plants supplied together with Loudon's advice (the purchasing patterns indicate that either his or some other well-known gardening advice was acted on), it might be asked why the Uttoxeter and Lichfield workhouses grew such a range of crops and why they made year-round purchases instead of saving large quantities of seed. Rather than there being any deep-rooted desire to see variety within pauper diets, the answers were largely practical. Plant varieties with long growing seasons that could be propagated without cold frames or glasshouses were particularly desirable. Even with copious applications of dung, crop rotation was needed to give soil time to replenish nutrients to prevent diminishing returns. Crops could fail or be decimated by rodents, insects, disease or rot, and much still depended on what was seasonal. Barnet workhouse saved potatoes for seed and preserved others in sand (a common method of storing vegetables), but Benjamin Woodcock noted, 'We have been obliged to throw away upwards of 30 bushels in consequence of the wet and the frost'.¹¹¹ Furthermore, Loudon's advice, culled from leading authorities on how to save seed and protect plants from fly, clubroot and other diseases, acknowledged that enclosed gardens could present growers with particular difficulties, including cross-pollination. From experience he thought it preferable to procure seeds 'from the regular seedsmen, as the seed farmers have opportunities of keeping the sorts distinct, which cannot be done within the precincts of a walled garden'.¹¹² Allowing some crops to produce seed rather than consuming the produce, though admirable, may have proved a false economy.

From what was grown in Staffordshire's workhouses it is evident that the idea of monotonous pauper fare illustrated in dietaries, alleviated by treats on special occasions, needs to be re-evaluated. Indeed, in workhouses with gardens the range of vegetables was more extensive than current scholarship recognises, but should be contextualised by reference to what inmates consumed before their admission, with local dietary habits and with other institutions broadly defined.¹¹³ Besides observing Uttoxeter's 'well-cultivated' garden, William Pitt listed vegetables commonly grown in Staffordshire: 'potatoes, beans, peas, cabbages, French or kidney beans, broccoli, Savoys, turnips, carrots, onions, beets, spinach, lettuce and many other kinds of pot herbs and salads'.¹¹⁴ Pitt's list mirrors almost exactly that grown at Uttoxeter and Lichfield workhouses, but he also recommended that labourers' gardens be planted with fruit trees and bushes. Staffordshire's vouchers contain no evidence of these, perhaps because they were already established, as at Winslow, Buckinghamshire, making such purchases unnecessary or very infrequent.¹¹⁵ A single voucher notes the purchase of apple trees in Thelkeld, Cumberland.¹¹⁶ Based

on limited evidence, the tentative conclusion is that, while rarer, fruit growing was conducted in workhouse gardens.

V. *Liverpool Workhouse*

A different approach to workhouse land, akin to the landscaped grounds of asylums, was taken in Liverpool.¹¹⁷ By the late 1760s the workhouse bordering College Lane and Hanover Street had outgrown its usefulness.¹¹⁸ Its central location had become so 'unhealthful to the poor; and disagreeable to the neighbourhood' that it was decided to 'erect a large and commodious Poor House, in an airy and healthful situation' adjoining the town.¹¹⁹

Liverpool's new workhouse stood on rising ground between Brownlow Hill Lane and Mount Pleasant.¹²⁰ Burdett's (1770) and Troughton's (c.1800) engravings show the workhouse surrounded by open ground planted with trees and shrubs and enclosed by walls and railings; no vegetable garden is evident.¹²¹ Although Eden listed a gardener, an under-gardener and twelve assistants, his commentary on Liverpool workhouse makes no specific reference to a garden.¹²² To the south of the workhouse, Rector's Five Fields, purchased in 1728, provided Liverpool's earlier workhouse with fresh produce but were insufficient to supply the needs of the new workhouse.¹²³ The result was that potatoes, onions and turnips were all purchased, and the land around the workhouse put to a different use.¹²⁴ Instead of supplying fruit and vegetable seeds and plants (excepting twenty-seven dwarf apple trees), the orders dispatched from Caldwell's nursery to Liverpool in October 1793 consisted of deciduous and evergreen trees: beech, Spanish and horse chestnut, elm, lime, sugar maple, fir, larch, sycamore, mountain ash, black Italian poplar and willow.¹²⁵ Apart from the Spanish chestnuts and dwarf apples, all the trees appear in James Meader's *Planter's Guide* of 1779, suggesting the establishment of a landscaped plantation.¹²⁶ In all, 645 trees plus 150 'Mixt Shrubs' were ordered. Like other commercial nurseries, Caldwell's gave practical assistance too: a nurseryman was paid for three days to plant them.¹²⁷

Landscaping Liverpool's workhouse grounds created a triangle of public and semi-public open areas with Ranelagh Gardens to the west and St James' Walk to the south and were perhaps influenced by the existing landscaping at the nearby infirmary.¹²⁸ While workhouse grounds on the urban fringe fitted neatly into the wider garden aesthetic characteristic of many late Georgian towns – Bristo Bedlam was close to Edinburgh's New Town – the creation of a plantation screened the workhouse, infirmary and house of correction from the new housing developments around Mount Pleasant designed for the town's wealthy merchants.¹²⁹ More prosaically, the close proximity of St James' Walk to the workhouse may help to explain why the grounds of the latter were landscaped rather than cultivated for food. According to Aikin, St James' Walk was 'handsomely laid out and planted on the high ground above the south end of town [but] the bleakness of its exposure [...] makes it unfavourable for vegetation'.¹³⁰ Given the stated desire to build the new workhouse in an airy and healthful situation, the action taken in Liverpool also reflected a new enlightened approach to the design of institutions: namely, that such places should conform to certain standards of location, accommodation and facilities, including landscaped grounds.¹³¹ The grounds were neither as complex nor as picturesque nor as expensive to create as those in private asylums (or indeed later public ones), but with their elevated location, vistas, mixture of planting, open areas and pathways they contained the essential elements considered necessary for moral and therapeutic improvement, whatever the given institutional setting.¹³² This was partly influenced by contemporary

taste and developments on landed estates, but on both practical and philosophical levels Giulia Pacini contends that eighteenth-century scientists and urban planners 'worried about the quality of air and the politico-moral consequences of an insalubrious climate'.¹³³ Consequently, Enlightenment thinking may have had a greater impact on institutional landscapes than rather imprecise notions of eighteenth-century 'taste'.¹³⁴

VI. Horticultural Practice

Workhouse gardens were rarely in the vanguard of horticultural experimentation, but to increase crop yields and to extend growing seasons they incorporated cultivars and planting techniques found on landed estates, in the gardens of wealthy industrialists and discussed in gardening manuals. Altrincham carrot seed, purchased by Lichfield's overseers, had previously been tested in the Horticultural Society's garden; archangel or bass mats (the Georgian equivalent of horticultural fleece) were regularly purchased by the overseers of Uttoxeter and supplied by Caldwell's to Lyme Hall and Quarry Bank, both in Cheshire.¹³⁵ What was being grown at Uttoxeter and Lichfield compares well with Batty Langley's planting scheme for kitchen gardens on landed estates.¹³⁶ Of Langley's thirty-three recommended vegetables, nineteen (57.6 per cent) were grown in the Uttoxeter garden, but additional vegetables such as broccoli were also planted. At Lichfield fifteen were grown. Langley's plan represented an ideal, but similar purchases were made by Thomas Legh of Lyme Hall. Caldwell's ledgers show that between April 1792 and March 1794 Legh placed six orders containing twenty-six types of vegetable.¹³⁷ The main difference between Lyme and the workhouses lies in the number of varieties within each cultivar purchased by Legh: eleven different types of cabbage, ten of beans, seven of peas and four each of turnip, onion and lettuce. Herbs included parsley, basil, marjoram and savory. Alongside the vegetable seeds, Legh also purchased an extensive array of ornamental flowers and shrubs. In the private garden of cotton manufacturer Samuel Greg at Quarry Bank twenty of Langley's recommended vegetables (just one more than at Uttoxeter) came from Caldwell's between October 1789 and December 1795.¹³⁸ As at Lyme, there were greater numbers of individual varieties, including eight types of beans, seven of peas, five each of cabbage, onion and turnip, three of broccoli and two of radish, as well as carrots, lettuce, spinach, asparagus, potatoes, celery, leeks, garlic, white, green and red beets, salsify, scorzonera and shallots. What was being grown in workhouses was not dramatically different from other kitchen gardens or from recommendations in planting plans. Admittedly Uttoxeter and Lichfield were not growing the melons, cucumbers, artichokes or endive suggested by Langley, or the cucumber, salsify and vines grown at Lyme, or the variety of fruits, including gooseberries, raspberries, mulberries, plums and apples, grown at Quarry Bank, but the similarity with other produce is striking. The conclusion is that, while workhouse gardens did not grow luxury or exotic items, the core produce was fundamentally the same as estate gardens. On this evidence, some workhouse dietaries, replete with a wide variety of seasonal vegetables, potentially fuelled wider critiques regarding the 'generosity' of the old poor law.¹³⁹

VII. Conclusion

Through the deployment of under-utilised overseers' vouchers and nursery ledgers this article has opened up new pathways in poor law studies and garden history. The economics of landscape and the potential impact garden produce had on institutional diets have been highlighted. This article has revealed that workhouse gardening was not simply

about food, costs and pauper employment but also about managing the expectations and resentments of ratepayers, vestries, theorists and politicians. Based on Enlightenment thinking, similarities in approach to landscapes in different institutional settings counter-balance perceptions of excessive expenditure, blunt assertions of wastefulness by critics such as the Revd Joseph Townsend, who thought that through parish relief the poor would be 'abundantly supplied [...] with food and raiment [...] at the expense of others' and opportunities for administrative misconduct.¹⁴⁰ Lichfield, Uttoxeter and Liverpool exhibited an organised and considered approach to gardening, based on practical knowledge of what could be grown, how and when, rather than on simple exercises in cost reduction. There was also a recognition that workhouse land instilled moral and therapeutic benefit. Triangulating workhouse gardens with estate kitchen gardens shows that what was grown in terms of staple crops was neither more limited than that available to others nor lacking in range. Where the difference does occur is in the number varieties grown within particular species. A tendency for workhouse suppliers to note 'beans' or 'cabbage' on their bills rather than specific varieties, however, obscures the true range available to inmates. Inmates in workhouses with productive gardens benefited from a wide range of vegetables, but the full extent of gardening under the old poor law remains to be explored. It would be unwise, therefore, to declare a 'golden age' for inmates' diets prior to the changes wrought by the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act.

NOTES

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