**E2 Activity KS3 & KS4 Did the Treatment of Poor People Improve after 1834 Poor Law ?**

More than 6,000,000 people visited the Great Exhibition in 1851. But what about the people who did not come? Among those who did not visit would have been poor people without means to support themselves. Had life improved for them since the introduction of the Poor law of 1834?

Before 1834 there was no one way of providing help for the poor. The local parish could build a workhouse if it wanted to and make the poor work for their keep. The parish could decide to give the poor money when they needed it.

 Some used the Speenhamland System; this linked the amount of money handed out to the price of [bread](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/caring/default.htm) and the number of people in the family. But in 1834 all the different methods of helping the poor were abolished and replaced by the New Poor Law.

The New Poor Law was introduced by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which was based upon a report published in 1832. This report had been written by Edwin Chadwick. He wanted the poor to be helped to support themselves. He wanted children to be educated and taught a trade, but many of his ideas were forgotten when the Act was put into force.

The Poor Law Amendment Act set up the Poor Law Commission in London, which was responsible for the organisation of Poor Relief throughout England and Wales. Parishes were grouped into 'Unions' and each Union had to build a workhouse.

Plans for the construction of Workhouses were provided by the Commission, which also sent out rules and regulations. Unions were told how Workhouses were to be run and how paupers, the term used for people who entered the Workhouse, were to be treated.

After 1834, anybody who wanted help had to go into the Workhouse. Outdoor relief, giving money to people living in their own homes, was banned, unless the people were old or sick. In the Workhouse, the conditions were to be worse than anything that people might find outside; this was the idea of 'less eligibility'.

To make sure that Unions kept to the regulations, the Commission sent inspectors to every Workhouse at least once a year. These inspectors were called Assistant Commissioners. They wrote reports on all the Workhouses and sent them to the Commission in London.

The New Poor Law was supposed to be more efficient, but did the care of the poor really improve after the Poor Law Amendment Act?[[1]](#footnote-1)

Visit the National Archives for original documents and activities. Each document has a series of Tasks suitable for KS 3 & 4

1.Huddersfield Report 1847 Response to negative report from Medical Officer of Health.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/caring/default.htm>

2.Report by Thomas Tatham , Medical Officer.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/caring/source1.htm>

3.Week’s Dietary Input Huddersfield 1848.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/caring/source3.htm>

4.Report of Overseer June 1948 Huddersfield.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/caring/source4.htm>

5.This is the ‘dietary’ for the Reigate Workhouse in Surrey.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/caring/source5.htm>

6.This is part of a letter sent from the Reigate Union to an Assistant Poor Law Commissioner. His job was to inspect the Unions in his area and make sure that they were obeying the rules laid down by the 1834 Act.
The letter explains why the Union paid outdoor relief to people living outside the workhouse which was not encouraged. Wages are given in pounds and shillings. Some are disabled people.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/caring/source6.htm>

7.This is an extract from a report by the Assistant Poor Law Commissioner
on the Reigate Workhouse on 12th February 1851.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/caring/source7.htm>

8.This is part of a letter written by an Assistant Poor Law Commissioner
to the Poor Law Commissioners.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/caring/source8.htm>

All can be downloaded to be printed in more legible copies from

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/pdf/caring.pdf>

1. From <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/caring/default.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)