



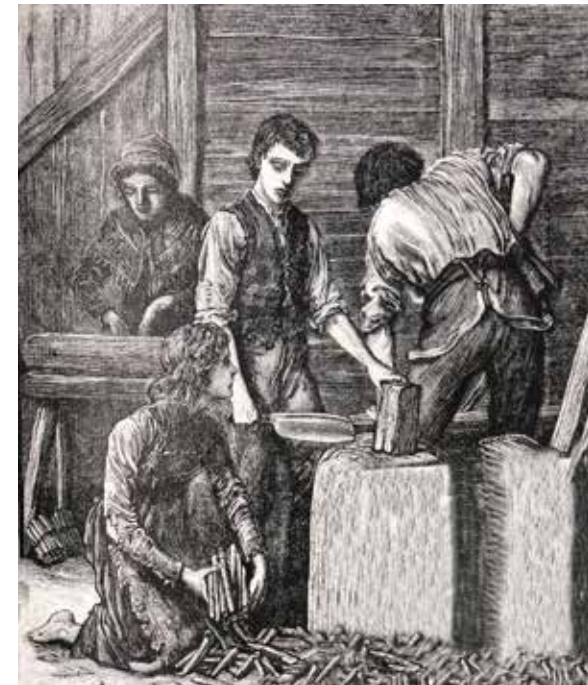
given brushes or combs, and their food was kept in the toilets. The Matron was also reported to have beaten the inmates.

This is the place that two small boys were brought to after their mother died in childbirth. Their father moved to Brixham to live with another woman, and the family was split up; the 12-year-old girl went into domestic service, the baby was put up for adoption, and the two boys, aged seven and three, were put into

Newton Abbot workhouse as 'abandoned children'. Sadly the three-year-old died as a result of the conditions there, leaving his brother all alone.

The story did end fairly happily, however. The surviving brother managed to make contact with his sister, and when she was about 20 and he was 15 they signed up together to emigrate to Australia under a government scheme to encourage settlement there. He started a new life, and his descendants still live in Australia.

NEWTON ABBOT STORIES



The Boy in the Workhouse

**NOTICING
NEWTON ABBOT**

AN EXPLORATION OF THE TOWN'S BUILDINGS, PEOPLE AND EVENTS

Leaflet written by Katy and Michael Bennie

The sad story of William Pearn

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, each parish was required to provide food and accommodation for local people who could not look after themselves – either because they had no work or because they were old or sick. The places where these were provided were called workhouses, and poor orphans and abandoned children were also sent there. Newton Abbot Union Workhouse was built in East Street in 1837 to serve a number of local parishes.

Life in the workhouse was hard. Inmates slept in dormitories with only the most basic facilities; families were split up, and only the youngest children were allowed to stay with their mothers. The food was very limited, and many inmates became sick and some died. Those who could

work were given jobs to do and there were supposed to be schools for the children – although these were not always provided.

In 1894, there was an investigation into conditions at Newton Abbot workhouse.

It found that the dormitories were filthy, and many of the inmates were infested with fleas and lice. Some elderly people were put naked in straitjackets and tied to their beds to keep them quiet; one died as a result. Children were also tied to their beds to prevent them from running around. Eleven children were found to have only four nightgowns between them. The inmates were not

