

# The Life Histories of the Elderly Poor in Late-Victorian England

A User Guide to the Dataset

Dr Tom Heritage

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## Introduction

This is an individual-level and longitudinal dataset comprising the life histories of men and women aged 60 years and over who were recorded in source materials related to the New Poor Law regime in late-Victorian England. The New Poor Law was responsible for the overall administration of state-funded welfare for the poor, particularly to those who were deemed ‘not-able-bodied’, of which the ‘aged and infirm’ were a substantial subcategory. The majority of those applying for welfare (or what was then termed ‘poor relief’) would receive a weekly allowance paid in one’s household, or ‘outdoor relief’. On average, single applicants could receive between 2-3 shillings weekly, although married couples could receive up to 4 shillings (Lees, 1998).

However, an application for outdoor relief could be rejected by the Board of Guardians, who were responsible for issuing poor relief in their respective Poor Law Union. There were approximately 650 Poor Law Unions in England and Wales, comprising a group of adjacent parishes, and were roughly coterminous with the registration districts used as boundaries when preparing a national census. The Board of Guardians could instead offer ‘indoor relief’, or accommodation and care inside a Poor Law Union workhouse. Historians have found that workhouse populations came to be dominated by older men and women, and the character of the workhouse gradually changed from punitive prison into an institution predominantly providing care for older people (Ritch, 2014; Boyer, 2016; Schurer *et al.*, 2018).

Studies have shown that older men over women were more likely to be offered indoor relief, owing to perceptions about the domesticated nature of women and their more adequate provision of child care at home (Goose, 2005). Others point to variations in age profile, where those in their seventies and eighties were more likely to be offered outdoor relief (Boyer, 2016). Their research has often been conducted without detailed reference to the life histories of actual individuals recorded in the census enumerators’ books (CEBs). Therefore, the objectives of this dataset are:

1. To reconcile the entries of those recorded in the New Poor Law source materials with their appearance in the CEBs.
2. To trace the appearance of these names across censuses to build a more comprehensive picture of the socio-economic profile of older indoor relief and outdoor relief recipients.
3. To investigate differences between older indoor relief and outdoor relief recipients.

To do this, census entries of individuals that appear in the New Poor Law source materials at two periods of their life course are transcribed. The ‘later period’ of their life course involves their circumstances when they were recorded in the census as aged 53-92 years in the periods 1881-1891. Depending on their traceability, they are then traced back to the ‘earlier period’ of their life course, where the individuals were recorded in the census as aged between 21-68 years in the periods 1851-1861. This dataset was used in a paper written by the present author, which focused on an assessment of 489 individuals recorded as living in domestic households that were traceable in both the ‘later period’ 1881-1891 and the ‘earlier period’ 1851-1861. Descriptive and logistic regression techniques measured the likelihood of receiving indoor and outdoor relief via occupational structure, migration, and the extent of relatives in the household (Heritage, 2022). A copy of the paper, presented at the British Society for Population Studies Annual Conference, University of Winchester, 5-7 September 2022, is available on request at [HeritageTomS@aol.com](mailto:HeritageTomS@aol.com). Note that when ‘names’ are mentioned, they were only transcribed as part of the initial data collection, and are *not* released to the UK Data Service. Instead, each individual is distinguished by an anonymized ID code.

### Source Materials Related to the New Poor Law

The data on older men and women receiving welfare appears in: a) outdoor relief application and report books (where outdoor relief was issued); b) workhouse admissions and discharge registers (where indoor relief was issued). Their existence overall is somewhat patchy. However, the outdoor relief application and report books of Godstone Union are available from the period 1869 until 1915, albeit with gaps. Due to the rarity of these materials, it was decided to focus on Poor Law Unions with the same characteristics (i.e., mainly rural with a market town). To ensure linkage with the CEBs, the years in which samples of individuals were extracted from the New Poor Law source materials roughly correspond with that of the 1881 and 1891 censuses, except for Chertsey, as its data only survive from 1894.

The following table shows the source materials used by county, by type of relief, by type of materials, sample years and archival access. They were gathered from either microfilm scans, the physical artefacts or data transcribed online by genealogists Kathryn and Phillip Bennett (Cherstey Union) and Mike and Gill Couper (Godstone Union).

Poor Law Union	County	Relief	Materials	Sample Years	Source
Alton	Hampshire	Outdoor	Application and Report Books	1880-1882	Hampshire Archives and Local Studies, PL3/2/89-90, PL3/2/128-129
Chertsey	Surrey	Indoor	Admissions and Discharge Registers	1894-1895	Surrey History Centre, BG1/36/1, also online at <a href="https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/culture-and-leisure/history-centre/researchers/guides/poor-law-records/chertsey">https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/culture-and-leisure/history-centre/researchers/guides/poor-law-records/chertsey</a> (accessed 7/6/22)
Godstone	Surrey	Outdoor	Application and Report Books	1880-1882	Surrey History Centre, BG5/55/5-9, online at <a href="https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/culture-and-leisure/history-centre/researchers/guides/poor-law-records/godstone">https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/culture-and-leisure/history-centre/researchers/guides/poor-law-records/godstone</a> (accessed 7/6/22)
Ripon	Yorkshire West Riding	Indoor	Admissions and Discharge Registers	1880-1884	North Yorkshire Record Office, BG/RI 5/3/1
Ripon	Yorkshire West Riding	Outdoor	Application and Report Books	1880-1881	North Yorkshire Record Office, BG/RI 4/1/4
Winchester	Hampshire	Indoor	Admissions and Discharge Registers	1880-1884	Hampshire Archives and Local Studies, PL5/11/32-34

## Gathering the Names

The names of those in the New Poor Law source materials were input into Excel and checked for any duplication of names. Overall, 1,088 individuals were recorded as either successfully receiving outdoor relief or indoor relief. In few cases, they were recorded as receiving both forms of welfare over time. This table stratifies the numbers by Poor Law Union.

Poor Law Union	Relief Type	Numbers In Relief Records
Alton	Outdoors	307
Chertsey	Indoors	105
Godstone	Outdoors	185
Ripon	Indoors	124
Ripon	Outdoors	203
Winchester	Indoors	164
<b>Total</b>		<b>1088</b>

Each entry was then cross-checked using the CEBs available on Ancestry Online. Although names are available in a secure data format via Integrated Census Microdata datasets (I-CeM), Ancestry Online contains a search database making it easier to search for relevant names.

When tracing these names to the corresponding census period (either 1881 or 1891 depending on the year in which samples of individuals were extracted), then 61 per cent of the numbers in the relief records were successfully traced, or 664 individuals. In fact, another 29 were originally traced, making 693 (or 63.7 per cent). However, the 29 comprise those that not only received indoor relief in the workhouse admissions and discharge registers of Chertsey, Ripon and Winchester, but were also in the same Union workhouse on census night (8 in Chertsey, 13 in Ripon and 8 in Winchester). It was decided to not incorporate the 29 into the dataset, as it would bias the results when analyzing the differences between indoor relief and outdoor relief recipients. The 664 individuals that were successfully traced are broken down by Poor Law Union and are as follows:

Union	Relief Type	Traced 81-91 CEBs	In Relief Records	% Traced 81-91 CEBs
Alton	Outdoors	237	307	77.2
Chertsey	Indoors	50	105	47.6
Godstone	Outdoors	125	185	67.6
Ripon	Indoors/Both	34	124	27.4
Ripon	Outdoors	157	203	77.3
Winchester	Indoors	61	164	37.2
<b>Total</b>		<b>664</b>	<b>1088</b>	<b>61.0</b>

The command to execute this using the software Stata/MP 17.0 is:

```
tab Union Relief if Year>=1881 & Year<=1891
```

Note that those receiving indoor relief solely and the seven that were recorded as receiving both indoor relief and outdoor relief in the Ripon Union (designated individually in the ‘Relief’ variable as ‘Both’) were combined for this table. As one notices, workhouse populations are more difficult to trace across censuses, either because they are more migratory throughout their lives, were travelling between workhouses situated across counties, or they may have avoided enumeration in the census as non-settled vagrants with no fixed abode.

Along with the 664 traced in 1881-1891, 68 could only be traced in 1851-1861, 67 of whom were in a domestic household, the other recorded on a ship at sea (in other words, they did not appear in the 1881 or 1891 census, or were situated in Chertsey, Ripon and Winchester

workhouses on census night). Together, they make 732 separate individuals spanning 1,229 observations in our dataset, or 67.3 per cent of the 1,088 individuals recorded on poor relief.

Of the 732, 489 were linked in both the 1851-1861 and 1881-1891 censuses and living in domestic households in both periods, or 66.8 per cent. Also, 162 could only be traced in a domestic household in the 1881-1891 census. A further 67 could only be traced in a domestic household in the 1851-1861 census. Seven were recorded in an institution outside of the census in at least one census period. This table, which shows the anonymized ID number of the individual, the specific institution, and the year in which they appeared in that institution follows:

AnonID Number	Year in Institution	Institution
N0122	1881	Andover Workhouse, Hampshire
N0304	1891	Windsor Union Workhouse
N0315	1881	Symonds Street Christs Hospital Charity
N0358	1881	Newbury Workhouse, Berkshire
N0673	1861	Misc Ships at Sea
N0710	1891	Wokingham Workhouse, Berkshire
N0729	1891	Porstea Workhouse, Hampshire

Finally, seven received both indoor and outdoor relief and were therefore categorized under the label 'Indoor Poor on Outdoor Relief' in the 'BothPeriods' variable, regardless of their appearance in a domestic household.

The variable 'BothPeriods' is used to count the numbers that were traceable in both census periods (1851-1861 and 1881-1891). To execute in Stata, one commands:

```
tab BothPeriods if Entity==1
```

They are presented as follows:

Status	Number	Percentage
Linked in Both Periods	489	66.8
Appear in 1851-61 Only	67	9.2
Appear in 1881-91 Only	162	22.1
Recorded in Institution in Census	7	1.0
Indoor Poor on Outdoor Relief	7	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>732</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Of the 489 linked in both census periods and living in a domestic household, under half of those appearing in the New Poor Law records (44.9 per cent) were successfully traced in both

census periods. The proportions are depressed by the similar figures for the indoor relief populations of Chertsey, Ripon and Winchester, at between 14-26 per cent. There is thus caution in applying our subsample, as they may not wholly reflect the vast experiences of the indoor poor:

Poor Law Union	Relief Type	Traced in both 81-91/51-61 CEBs	Seen in Poor Law Records	% Seen in Poor Law Records traced in both 81-91/51-61 CEBs
Alton	Outdoors	201	307	65.5
Chertsey	Indoors	27	105	25.7
Godstone	Outdoors	95	185	51.4
Ripon	Indoors	17	124	13.7
Ripon	Outdoors	107	203	52.7
Winchester	Indoors	42	164	25.6
<b>Total</b>		<b>489</b>	<b>1088</b>	<b>44.9</b>

To obtain these results in Stata, use the command:

```
tab Union Relief if BothPeriods==1
```

Then divide the numbers listed under the label ‘Type of Relief’ by two.

## The Dataset

The decision to incorporate the census entries of individuals whose descriptions matched that of their entry in the New Poor Law source materials was based on certain criteria. One was their recorded age in both the outdoor relief application and report books and workhouse admissions and discharge registers, and whether it roughly matched the census entry. The other was whether the entry on birthplace recorded in the census reflected that recorded in the workhouse admissions and discharge registers or the individual’s residence in the outdoor relief application and report books. Finally, the parish of residence in both the census and the individual’s parish location in the New Poor Law source materials was used to decide whether an individual was successfully linked.

An Excel document was produced to transcribe traced individuals and their families recorded in the census, which included their house number, their families’ surname, first name, relationship to their household head, marital status, sex, age, occupation, birthplace, birth county, parish of residence, and county of residence. These details enabled the tracing of these individuals in census entries recorded three decades before, via consulting their occupation, their birthplace, residential location, and their family members.

The names of those on relief were transcribed row by row onto a secondary Excel file; their family members reduced to the number of relatives in a household, or the continuous variable 'NoOfRelatives'. Coding was applied as categorical data to marital status, birth county, county of residence and age status.

Afterwards, the data migrated to Stata where they were treated to extensive coding related to the geographical, economic, and regional composition of the Poor Law Union, and full labelling of the coding of the variables initially done on Excel and completed on Stata. For example, 44 strings related to the 'Relationship to the Head of the Family' column in the original census are reduced to 30 in the 'Relation' variable and to three categories in the 'RelationtoHead' variable (0=Head/Spouse; 1=Relatives/Offspring; 2=Unrelated to Head). The background economic composition of the Poor Law Unions, known as the variable 'EcoType', was categorized as a binary code, with '0' denoting Market Town, or a rural, small-town district and '1' denoting Residential, or suburban in character. This is inspired by the classification of Poor Law Unions established by Victorian philanthropist Charles Booth in his publication *The Aged Poor in England and Wales* (1894).

The 'AgeStatus' variable refers to the age of the entrant expressed categorically depending on the stage of an individual's life course. It varies according to the actual age given in the 1851-1861 and 1881-1891 censuses. It is expressed in three groups:

0 = "Early Stage" (referring to individuals recorded in the 1851-1861 census as aged between 21-39 years; those recorded in the 1881-1891 census as aged between 53-69 years).

1 = "Middle Stage" (referring to individuals recorded in the 1851-1861 census as aged between 40-49 years; those recorded in the 1881-1891 census as aged between 70-79 years).

2 = "Older Stage" (referring to individuals recorded in the 1851-1861 census as aged 50 years and over; those recorded in the 1881-1891 census as aged 80 years and over).

The data are ordered by ID denoting the order of the dataset. These do not correspond to the AnonID denoting each anonymized individual, although this variable itself can be ordered on Excel/Stata by the user, starting with 'N0001' and ending with 'N0732'.

To run the logistic regressions used in the paper by Heritage, 2022, command in Stata:

```
logit Relief i.MaritalStatus i.Sex i.Relatives i.AgeStatus  
i.RelationtoHead i.BorninCounty i.LivesinCounty i.ActivelyinWork if  
Year>=1881 & Year<=1891 & BothPeriods==1, robust or
```



```
logit Relief i.MaritalStatus i.Sex i.Relatives i.AgeStatus
i.RelationtoHead i.BorninCounty i.LivesinCounty i.ActivelyinWork if
Year>=1851 & Year<=1861 & BothPeriods==1, robust or
```

With the absence of names, the anonymized ID codes enable a straightforward biographical analysis of the individuals contained in the dataset. For example, N0003 is identified as female and is recorded as having received outdoor relief in her old age in the application and report books of Alton Poor Law Union, Hampshire. She is traceable as a 78-year-old in both 1881 (the ‘later period’ of her life) and as a 48-year-old in 1851 (the ‘earlier period’). In both periods, she is head of the household and widowed. Although related to five others in her household in 1851, this fell to only one in 1881. Her occupation in 1851 tells us that she was a ‘pauper charwoman’, which informs that she had received welfare before reaching old age. The 1881 description provides information on her spouse’s occupation as a labourer (as she is termed ‘Labourer’s Widow’). Both census periods identify her birthplace as Ropley, Hampshire, although she migrated from Bentworth to nearby Medstead between 1851 and 1881.

A complete guide to each variable, its number, label, and description in the dataset is presented below:

<b>N</b>	<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b>LABEL</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
<b>1</b>	ID	ID	Denotes order of dataset (N=1,229)
<b>2</b>	AnonID	Anonymized ID Codes	The anonymized identification number of an individual entrant (N=732)
<b>3</b>	Union	Union	The Poor Law Union where one was based
<b>4</b>	GeoType	Geographical Type	The county in which the Poor Law Union where one was based was located (0=Yorkshire; 1=Surrey; 2=Hampshire)
<b>5</b>	EcoType	Economic Type	The economic composition of the Poor Law Union (0=Market Town; 1=Residential), inspired by Charles Booth (1894)
<b>6</b>	Region	Region	The region in which the Poor Law Union is based (0=North, representing Ripon Union; 1=South, representing Alton, Godstone, Surrey and Winchester Unions)
<b>7</b>	Relief	Type of Relief	The type of relief that one received (0=Outdoor Relief; 1=Indoor Relief; 2=Both)

<b>8</b>	Sex	Sex	The sex profile of the entrant (0=Female; 1=Male)
<b>9</b>	Year	Year	The census year in which one appears (1851, 1861, 1881, 1891)
<b>10</b>	Entity	First Appearance	Whether this is their first recorded entry in the dataset (0=Already Appeared; 1=First Appearance)
<b>11</b>	YearStage	Life Course Period	The stage in one's life course (0=Early, or taking place in the 1851/1861 census; 1=Later, or taking place in the 1881/1891 census)
<b>12</b>	BothPeriods	Linked in Both Periods	Whether the entrant was linked in both the 1881/1891 and 1851/1861 censuses (1=Linked in Both Periods; 2=Appear in 1851-61 Only; 3=Appear in 1881-91 Only; 4=Recorded in Institution in Census; 5=Indoor Poor on Outdoor Relief)
<b>13</b>	Relation	Relation	The familial position of the entrant in the household (recorded in the census under 'Relation to Head of the Family')
<b>14</b>	RelationtoHead	Relationship to Head	The familial position of the entrant in the household expressed categorically (0=Head/Spouse; 1=Relatives/Offspring; 2=Unrelated to Head)
<b>15</b>	NoOfRelatives	Number of Relatives	The number of relatives in a household expressed continuously
<b>16</b>	Relatives	Number of Relatives by Group	The number of relatives in a household expressed categorically (0= 0 relatives; 1= 1-2 relatives; 2= 3-6 relatives; 3= 7+ relatives)
<b>17</b>	Institutionalized	In an Institution	Whether the entrant was recorded in an institution in a particular census period (0=No; 1=Yes)
<b>18</b>	Married	Married	Whether the entrant was married (0=No; 1=Yes) – the purpose here is to distinguish

			those in the MaritalStatus variable category '0=Married/Not Known'.
<b>19</b>	NotKnown	Unknown Marital Status	Whether the entrant had unknown marital status (0=No; 1=Yes) – the purpose here is to distinguish those in the MaritalStatus variable category '0=Married/Not Known'.
<b>20</b>	MaritalStatus	Marital Status	Their marital position in the household (recorded in the census under 'Condition as to Marriage'). Expressed categorically (0=Married/Not Known; 1=Unmarried; 2=Widowed)
<b>21</b>	Age	Age	The age of the entrant expressed continuously
<b>22</b>	AgeStatus	Age Status	The age of the entrant expressed categorically (0=Early Stage; 1=Middle Stage; 2=Older Stage)
<b>23</b>	Occupation	Occupation	The occupation of the entrant (recorded in the census under 'Profession or Occupation')
<b>24</b>	ActivelyinWork	Actively in Work	Whether the entrant was recorded with an occupation that denotes work activity, rather than retirement or other means (0=Not Actively Working; 1=Actively Working)
<b>25</b>	BirthParish	Parish of Birth	The parish where the entrant was born
<b>26</b>	BirthCounty	County of Birth	The county where the entrant was born
<b>27</b>	BorninCounty	Born in County	Whether the entrant was recorded as born in the county where they would receive either outdoor or indoor relief in their old age (0=No; 1=Yes). Note that when an entrant received relief in Ripon Union, Yorkshire West Riding, they were coded 1=Yes even if they were born nearby in the North Riding.
<b>28</b>	ResidenceParish	Parish of Residence	The parish where the entrant was currently based at the time of the census

<b>29</b>	ResidenceCounty	County of Residence	The county where the entrant was currently based at the time of the census
<b>30</b>	LivesinCounty	Lives in County	Whether the entrant was recorded as living in the county where they would receive either outdoor or indoor relief in their old age (0=No; 1=Yes)

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