

Learning to read stories from the Workhouse

The award-winning Learning Team at Ripon Museum Trust arranged an educational and exciting session for both staff and volunteers this week when hours of research into stories from the workhouse, house of correction, and courthouse were revealed by museum volunteers Sue Dennison and Christine Price, who told us the hugely compelling stories of 'urchins, sprogs and guttersnipes' - children at the workhouse.

We were then joined by expert Dr. Paul Carter to who took us on a journey to discover the stories of paupers as uncovered in their own words. "Sir a poor man is Tossed about worse than any dog God help the poor man...". Dr Carter is currently working on a research project investigating the thousands of Victorian pauper letters that survive at The National Archives and his talk looked at their content and significance.

The stories revealed will be woven into the museums' programme of events and activities so that visiting schools, groups and day visitors can also hear these voices from the past. Keeping our offering at the museum fresh and new and bringing the past to the present is key in the museums' aim to tell the story of poverty, law and order.

Our volunteers were enthusiastic in their praise for the sessions: Dot Bowman, volunteer commented "we had a fantastic time - amazing speaker and so easy to listen to, really felt he didn't talk down to us and also very easy to interact with, only minor thing was I wish that we had had much more time, can he come back next week please?"

Lindy Webb, volunteer "For me the best thing about today's talk was that now I have the answers to some of the questions asked by visitors. To be able to tell a paupers story in their own words would be very powerful indeed. The talk certainly gave me a different perspective about life in the Workhouse"

Linda Campbell, volunteer, "Dr Paul Carter's lecture/workshop was excellent. It was so interesting and thought provoking and it was presented so that everyone, no matter what prior knowledge could understand."

Ends

Information: Ripon Museums Learning Team offers award-winning experiences to schools and groups, having won the prestigious Sandford Award with top marks and the Marsh Trust Award for Volunteers in Museum Learning.

Dr Paul Carter (Co-Investigator) Carter is employed at The National Archives as a principal records specialist and works across the modern domestic collections. He has worked extensively on the records created under the New Poor Law, particularly those created or collected by the central poor law authorities. He has also worked at the universities of Leicester, Northampton and Nottingham, researching or teaching within themes across modern social British history.

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Courthouse Museum, Minster Road, Ripon HG4 1QS

Prison and Police Museum, St. Marygate, Ripon HG4 1LX