

Master of the Workhouse

Samuel Mortlock (1808-1884) was the son and eldest child of Richard Mortlock of Shimpling (1774-1848), who removed to Lavenham (where his sister Priscilla was eventually married, presumably from his house), in about 1810 after a short spell in Boxted where Samuel and his next sibling were born. By 1832 Samuel, named for Richard's father, had moved on to London to make his way in the world and was living at 56, Upper North Place, Clerkenwell and was employed as a messenger in a Life Insurance Office. By 1839 he was established as a shoemaker at 3, Upper Seymour St, Euston Sq; he stood bail for an accused 6.1841 [LMA,MJ/R/P/020/062].

In 1841 also he was nominated for St Pancras to the General Council of the Chartists [*Northern Star and Leeds Advertiser*, 15.1.1842]. This does rather mark his card as a bit of a Leftie.

A Mr Mortlock is recorded as Master of the East London workhouse in Aldersgate Street in 1846, in court from time to time regarding infractions by his inmates [*Times*, 1846 et seq.], replaced in the next newspaper report in 1851 by someone else. While this Mortlock's first name or initial seem nowhere given, this may have been Samuel and such employment would have been a recommendation where he next appears. The opportunity for removal to the country would also have been attractive for a family man; Samuel's son Samuel Allen Mortlock had been born in Clerkenwell in 1832 to Samuel and his wife Ann. However the couple appear to have had no more children.

Samuel must have had an education, as in 1848 he was appointed master of the workhouse at Henley-on-Thames. Here he was able to get his family on the payroll - his wife as matron, his son, Samuel Allen as above, as clerk. By 1861 Samuel had managed to get his niece Eliza (who had been a servant in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea in 1851) onto the workhouse staff as well, as assistant matron. This cannot have been unhelpful to her 1866 Henley schoolmaster husband, James Stephen Sanders, obtaining a post by 1871 as schoolmaster to the Horsefair Boys' Home in Norwich, which of course also got Eliza back to East Anglia and indeed a job as Matron. By 1881 they had moved on and Sanders was Workhouse Master to the Hensted Union, perhaps more pleasantly in the countryside, at Swainsthorpe, Eliza again as matron. Here he managed a staff of six.

Samuel's career can be followed further, in some detail, in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, and the entries expose some of the realities of life for the Victorian poor. Samuel was frequently [see *The Times*], as workhouse master, in court regarding his charges, one of whom was effectively described as using the workhouse as a base from which to go pickpocketing by day. All too often he was prosecuting them for assaults against himself which seem to have been a regular hazard of his work. It will have been satisfying to see that sort of troublesome inmate sent down for two months' hard labour, for example. One of these assaults followed refusal to work (which may have included stone-breaking; in 1872 Samuel had contracted to supply broken stones for road repair); another occurred because Samuel had to turn away a man who was too drunk to be admitted (the drunk

only got 21 days). Another case concerned an Irish tramp who had wantonly destroyed her clothes. In August 1858 he was instrumental in identifying a baby found in the Thames at Reading in a weighted sack as an illegitimate child born in his Workhouse that May. In March 1861 Samuel had to give evidence regarding a servant girl of 25 who appears to have starved herself to death (her employers, accused by the police but not by the girl of supplying insufficient food, were acquitted of manslaughter). Samuel's job included arraigning the putative fathers of children born in the Workhouse - as in 1873, not always successfully.

Henley Workhouse was a quadrangular brick building erected in 1790. Schoolrooms were added in 1873 - a mixed blessing as the schoolmaster violently assaulted Samuel in 1873, as if assaults by the inmates were not enough. Samuel was concerned for the children who constituted over half of his two hundred plus population; in 1851 he took all the children on a day trip to the Great Exhibition, and he set up an annual charitable appeal to provide a special Christmas dinner for the inmates. In 1855 he was successful in persuading the Guardians to take this on and fund a dinner of roast beef and plum pudding.

Samuel was clearly a pillar of the Volunteers:



Photo of 'Uncle Samuel Mortlock' from ShirleyMcAnelly

A Private Mortlock shot with the Henley Rifle Corps in October 1861 and 1866 (and other years). It must be him!

Samuel was a regular major prizewinner, in many categories - both for flowers and for vegetables - at the summer and autumn Henley Horticultural Society shows, and at the Royal Berkshire show. That he was not the sole prizewinner is perhaps surprising seeing that he would have had the services of his inmates at his disposal to till and cultivate the ten acres of 'garden grounds' that surrounded his establishment. Glimpses of his private life show him chairing an elocution class presentation for the local Reading, Chess and

Music society in 1864; in 1866 he is recorded on the committee - sadly, within weeks of his wife's death. He was, however able to find a new wife within the year, and a newer model at that. Whether she also succeeded as Matron is not at present visible; an outsider would have needed quarters separate from the family. Elizabeth will have had to put up with his enthusiastically supporting the resurrection of the Henley cricket club in 1869; their only child had died the previous summer, she lived so short a while that she seems not to have been named. In 1883 Samuel, by now an old man, nearly met with a serious accident when his horse shied at an unattended steam engine. He died shortly before Christmas the next year.

Samuel Allen, trained up in this sort of administration via his work for his father at Henley, became Clerk of the Sussex County (later St Francis) Mental Asylum on the outskirts of Haywards Heath in Sussex. This elegant Victorian pile had, a century and a half later, been converted into highly desirable flats, for sale at £180,000 and more to City commuters.

In 1859 Samuel Allen married Emma Phillips, but she died childless in 1862. In 1873 Samuel Allen married again, to Rachel Adah Crawshaw. They also lost a daughter in infancy. A second daughter, Constance Adah Mortlock born in 1877, married in Brussels between 1901 and 1905; but this particular Mortlock male line died with Samuel Allen.

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