

JOHN MILSON RHODES, 1847-1909

Chorlton Guardian and Didsbury Doctor

Jean Barclay

In the centre of busy Didsbury village outside the former railway station stands an elegant stone clock tower which is inscribed "Erected in memory of Dr J. Milson Rhodes, J.P., C.A. — a friend to humanity". Few local people know much about Dr Rhodes, yet in his lifetime his renown as a Poor Law expert extended far beyond his home village. Dr John Milson Rhodes, in general practice in Didsbury from 1874 until his death in 1909, was one of those middle-class Victorians who gave years of voluntary service on boards of guardians, the local bodies responsible under the Poor Laws for the statutory relief of the poor.¹ Such work attracted few accolades and Dr Rhodes, who was a guardian for 27 years, a national figure as a Poor Law authority and social reformer, and much in demand at conferences at home and abroad, has only occasionally been mentioned by social historians. Dr Rhodes received no public honours and died relatively poor.



Dr. John Milson Rhodes.

Had he concentrated on his medical career Dr Rhodes could probably have become wealthy. As it was, his curiosity, his liking for strong administration, his skill in writing and statistics, and perhaps, in common with other middle-class witnesses to economic distress, a subconscious need to assuage what Beatrice Webb called the "class-consciousness of sin", led him into a life of public service that was morally, if not financially, rewarding.² This short account of his life and work seeks to redress the balance of earlier neglect of a remarkable local man.

It has not been easy to unearth details about Dr Rhodes's private life or his work as a general practitioner. He left no memoirs, had no children and, although an elderly Didsbury woman, writing in 1971, remembered Dr Rhodes being driven about the village by James Darbyshire his coachman, fellow Edwardians alive today would only have been small children when he died.³ His library of Poor Law books and writings inherited by the Chorlton Union which might have contained a personal note or two has sadly disappeared. Information on Dr Rhodes's work, character, and outlook on life has been gleaned from his public statements, his voluminous writings, descriptions by colleagues, and obituaries. This account begins by looking at Dr Rhodes' family and early life; moves on to give some idea of his character and attitudes, and finally discusses the Poor Law work on which he built his reputation.

Family Background

John Milson Rhodes was born in 1847, the youngest of three brothers all of whom would qualify in medicine and practice in Manchester. Their father, Milson Rhodes, a fustian salesman, was born in Kingston-upon-Hull in 1818 and their mother, Ann Keith Rhodes, in York in the same year. The Rhodes's were middle class but claimed distant kinship with the Scottish Earl of Wemyss — the name 'Wemyss' crops up frequently in the Rhodes family tree. Dr Rhodes's considerable literary skill was attributed to his family background

and among his first cousins was (Sir) Thomas Wemyss Reid, the noted *litterateur*, Liberal political commentator, and editor of the *Leeds Mercury*. At about the time of their marriage in the early 1840s, Milson and Ann Rhodes moved to Cheetham Street, Manchester, where Francis was born in 1843 and Thomas Wemyss in 1845. In 1847, the year of John Milson's birth, they were living in Kempster Street, Lower Broughton, Salford: by the time of the 1851 census the family had moved to Duke Street, Salford, and included Milson Rhodes's mother, Hannah Rhodes, his half-sister Mary Ann Leonard aged 39 who acted as nurse, and a 20-year-old female servant. In 1861 they were living in Stockport Road, Manchester; Francis was a druggist's assistant; Thomas Wemyss was a mechanical draughtsman, and John Milson, aged 13, was listed as a scholar.⁴ From 1863 to 1868 the family lived in Glasgow where the two older boys undertook medical training (qualifying M.B., C.M. and later M.D.), and John Milson matriculated.⁵ Milson Rhodes died aged 66 in August 1884 leaving £2,272; his wife four months later.⁶ (John Milson Rhodes was generally called 'Milson' like his father and this, in addition to 'Dr Rhodes', is how we will now refer to him).

In 1871, the Rhodes family was living in Upper Brook Street, Manchester, but Francis, having worked for two years as Resident Medical Officer at Withington Workhouse, had set up in private practice in Bradford, Yorkshire. He married Laura Russen of Huddersfield at this time and one of their six children, Milson Russen was later to partner his uncle in his Didsbury practice. In 1876 Francis Rhodes became District Medical Officer to the Chorlton Union and he was still in this post in 1888 when he died from pneumonia at the early age of 46.⁷ Thomas Wemyss Rhodes, the second brother, worked at Manchester's Southern Hospital for the Diseases of Women and Children from 1872 to 1876. In 1877 he set up in private practice as a surgeon and physician in Upper Brook Street,

Manchester, moving later to Barnfield Place in Oxford Street. He married twice and his son Stuart Wemyss was born in 1882 to his second wife. Thomas Rhodes moved to Northenden in the early 1890s and died there in 1896 aged 51.⁸

Milson Rhodes was the most well-known of the three brothers. After matriculating in Glasgow he became an undergraduate at Owens College and at the Manchester School of Medicine where he was first and second prizeman with honours. From Manchester, he moved to Edinburgh where he obtained the L.R.C.P., L.R.C.S., and L.M. in 1874. In 1879 he obtained his M.D. in Brussels.⁹ In 1874 Milson Rhodes set up his general practice at Ivy Lodge, Didsbury, which was to be his home for the rest of his life. He never married but was looked after by a live-in housekeeper and a coachman. The Midland Bank now stands on the site of his house at the junction of Wilmslow Road and Whitechapel Street.¹⁰ Didsbury, which is now a pleasant suburb of Manchester, was still a village in the later nineteenth century and popular with wealthy Manchester people who wanted to live outside the pall of smoke that covered the city. Although some of these would have been Dr Rhodes's patients it was counted to his credit that he had wider interests than "the curing of gout, dyspepsia, and the other ills that flesh so well fed as that of Didsbury is heir to".¹¹ Dr Rhodes soon became part of the community and supported local sporting teams and clubs, including the Didsbury Garden Suburb Society and the Didsbury Helpers, who visited poor people in their homes. He was a sidesman at Emmanuel Church in Barlow Moor Road and was active in the Didsbury Liberal Club.

Milson Rhodes's entrance to public life came in 1878 when he was appointed Overseer of the Poor for Didsbury Township, Chorlton Union. This unpaid but prestigious position involved collecting the poor rate for the district. In 1882 he was invited by Didsbury Conservatives as well as by the Liberals to stand on their behalf in the triennial election to the 22-strong Chorlton Board of Guardians.¹² The only opposition retired early from the contest; Dr Rhodes was returned unopposed and in all his 27 years on the Board he never once had to fight for his seat.

Chorlton Union, with its population of 300,000, was the second largest provincial union in the country, only

West Derby in Liverpool had a larger population. The Chorlton Union Workhouse at Withington, which was opened in 1855, and the Infirmary added on the site in the early 1860s, were much admired in Poor Law circles. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, in common with other boards of guardians, Chorlton sought to improve classification within the workhouse system so that the 'deserving poor' like the children, the aged, and the mentally weak could be offered specialised care apart from the casuals (able-bodied men in irregular employment) and the vagrants. In the 1890s Dr Rhodes would play a leading role in making special provision for pauper children, sane epileptics, and vagrants.

Character and Attitude

What sort of man was Milson Rhodes (apart from being a busy one!)? He was tall and spare in appearance, balding and bearded, neat in his dress, rather shy until carried away by his enthusiasms, and cheerful and kindly in manner. He was frail in his later years, plagued by the heart ailment that was to lead to his death at 62. If any one feature of the Victorian ethos characterised his outlook on social matters it was faith in the benefits of scientific method. In 1907, at a presentation to celebrate his Poor Law work, Rhodes commented that "If I have done good work for the poor it has been by bringing science to bear upon it, and by trying to show a good many of the causes lying at the root of the evils under the existing system".¹³ Milson Rhodes regarded as outmoded the *laissez-faire* approach that left the economy, the labour market and social problems to regulate themselves. Going against the grain of philanthropic opinion, he even advocated state intervention where necessary. Although Rhodes did not believe in spending the rates irresponsibly, he was not averse to spending public money for the public good by investing in schemes that seemed expensive but promised long-term benefits.

Dr. Rhodes was characteristic of his age and class in condemning 'loafers', 'corner men' and others he regarded as feckless but sympathising with people whose poverty and insanitary homes were no fault of their own and did not agree that they necessarily "made their own slums". He gave talks to organisations like the Co-operative Women's Guild and the Ancoats Healthy Homes Society and supported working people (sometimes



Rhodes's Memorial Clock-Tower, Didsbury, 1981.

by waiving medical fees), who were attempting through 'self-help' to improve their lot. Some of Rhodes' attitudes smacked of the ideas being preached by the new labour organisations, and when he met the Socialist Robert Blatchford in the 1890s he found that they shared similar views on the care of the poor and 'the condition of England' question.¹⁴ However, Rhodes sought no upheaval of the status quo. In 1897, when Dr A.W. Martin, a Chorlton guardian and a member of the Independent Labour Party, objected to Chorlton Board's proposal to congratulate Queen Victoria on her Diamond Jubilee (on the grounds that the poor shouldn't be grateful to the Queen but vice-versa), Dr Rhodes, Chairman of the Board, rebuked him for his language and said that he would not allow such disloyalty.¹⁵ Although he could not accept extreme views, he was a fairly tolerant man who lacked bigotry. During the guardian elections in 1898, when

members of the National Protestant League (the Conservative 'Church Party'), were placarding Manchester with the names of Catholic candidates and advising people not to vote for them, Rhodes said that although he was a "strong Protestant", he deplored such tactics and feared that petty religious differences would "ruin the work of the Board".¹⁶

Rhodes's attitude towards women of his own class was typical of men of his generation, a grudging acceptance of their abilities. In 1892 when women guardians were accused of giving out-relief too freely (anathema to most guardians), Rhodes stated that while he was in favour of having two ladies on every board, if they did become guardians they should first understand the work. In a letter to the *Lancet* in 1902 concerning Local Government Board women inspectors, Rhodes stated that he was "no advocate of women indecently usurping men's place in public administration" but thought that women inspectors were needed to supervise pauper girls boarded out with families or societies.¹⁷ In spite of his misgivings, Rhodes came to respect the judgement of Beatrice Potter (Webb) and other well-known women, and worked amicably with his fellow Chorlton guardians Mrs Pankhurst and Mrs Redford on cottage homes and epileptic colony schemes, respectively.

Rhodes had little time for young women of the working class, believing that they fell to pieces morally when they came to town.¹⁸ When it came to weakminded working-class women, he was almost paranoid. At a time when it was thought that the 'unfit' were reproducing at a faster rate than the strong and healthy, Rhodes, like many of his imperialist generation, feared that the British race would degenerate and be unable to hold its own internationally. Simple women, who were gullible and "like ninepins" ready to fall at a touch, were regarded as a particular problem — there was much less concern about the men. In Chorlton, Rhodes knew of several weakminded women whose "immoral lives" led them time after time to the workhouse maternity wards. Their children had "an evil mental inheritance" that would make them "beggars or paupers or worse, as naturally as water flows down hill". Instead of promoting the survival of the fittest the nation was perpetuating those who were "hereditarily totally unfit" to hold

their own in the battle of life.¹⁹ He also emphasised the importance to racial well-being of good housing, sanitation, and working conditions and his schemes of provision often had both environmental and eugenic objectives. Rural institutions for epileptics, for example, provided a healthy home and occupation on the one hand and prevented the "multiplication of the unfit" on the other.²⁰

In common with several of his colleagues, Rhodes regarded the relief of the poor as a local matter and resented the way in which 'pettifogging details' like the salary of the union clerk had to receive sanction from London. He found the Local Government Board bureaucratic and despaired of the time it took to authorise schemes — 18 months, for example, in 1896-8 in the case of the Tame Street Casual Wards. At a conference in 1895, Jenner-Fust, the LGB District Inspector for the North-West, remarked wryly that "they never had the pleasure of listening to a paper by Dr Rhodes without hearing a good-humoured fling at the Local Government Board!"²¹ In fact, Dr Rhodes worked well with Jenner-Fust for years and would have liked more power given to the district inspectors: his spleen was directed at the "red-tapeism" of "subordinate clerks" and other officials at the LGB headquarters in London.²²

Public Life and Work

Having discussed something of Rhodes's character and outlook, we can move on to look at his work. Although we shall concentrate on his Poor Law work, a few words about his clinical career will be useful — on many questions, for example epilepsy and workhouse hospitals, his medical background and Poor Law experience came together. Rhodes had medical duties and interests beyond his general practice. He was employed as a surgeon under the Factories and Workshops Acts and as an insurance company's medical referee. He regularly wrote to the medical press on topics that interested him. These were as wide-ranging as vaccination, hospital floors, the causes of epilepsy, and infant mortality. In 1902 in a paper on the Infant Life Protection Act of 1897 he expressed his concern about the high infant mortality rate and, in an attempt to improve the lot of infants in foster homes, he helped to obtain an amendment to the Act

which bestowed on public authorities greater powers of supervision.²³

Over the years, Milson Rhodes came to hold a number of influential positions. He was elected Chairman of the Poor Law Conference of England and Wales and of the Association of Poor Law Unions (which dealt with day-to-day union matters) and the Northern Workhouse Nursing Association, both of which he was a founder member. In 1892, representing Withington, he was elected to Lancashire County Council. He worked on the Council's Sanitary Sub-Committee, the Lancashire Asylums Board, and the Lancashire Inebriates Board. Later he was appointed a County Alderman, a Justice of the Peace, and Visiting Justice for His Majesty's Prison, Strangeways. Dr Rhodes also became Chairman of the Manchester South Division of the British Medical Association and helped found and became Vice-President of the French based *Société Internationale d'Assistance Publique*.²⁴

Rhodes was frequently away from home and he was doubtless glad when his nephew M. Russen Rhodes joined him in his general practice in 1904. His travels on Poor Law business cost him a great deal of time and money. By 1907 he had travelled 50,000 miles, only 10,000 of which were paid for by the rates. His foreign travels took him to two conferences in France, three in Belgium, one in Switzerland, and one in Austria-Hungary. In 1891 he visited institutions for epileptics in France; in 1897 in Germany and elsewhere on the Continent, and in 1901 in the USA. The booklets in which he presented his findings were widely circulated among boards of guardians and county council asylum committees.²⁵ Milson Rhodes was called to London to give evidence before the *Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded* in 1905 and the *Royal Commission on the Poor Laws* in 1907. In 1904, when Rhodes was not appointed a member of the *Feeble-Minded Commission*, the Executive Committee of the Poor Law Unions Conference protested to the Local Government Board. The reply was that Rhodes would be more useful as a witness than as a member, but one wonders if the LGB had found him too much a thorn in the flesh.²⁶

Between 1886 and 1906 Rhodes presented 30 papers at annual and

district Poor Law conferences, especially in the North-Western District. In addition to these addresses (which were published each year in the *Poor Law Conference Reports*) he wrote treatises on 'Women's Work and Wages', 'The Feeble-Minded Prisoner', and other topics. As space will not permit a full account of Rhodes' writing, his papers on the theory of pauperism and the Poor Law will only be mentioned briefly before moving on to his special areas of interest. In 1890, on behalf of the Committee for the Discussion of Social Questions he spoke at King's College, Cambridge, on 'Local variations of pauperism in England and their causes'. In the same year he addressed the British Association on 'Pauperism past and present': *The Times* devoted a long leader to his paper; it was widely circulated in pamphlet form, and after translation by a leading French economist, was incorporated into a work on the Poor Law in France. Later in 1890, Rhodes presented the same paper to the Manchester Statistical Society, and in 1891, also to the Society, another on 'The objective causes of poverty'.²⁷

Rhodes's 'specialities' were (in a rough chronological order of his first writing on them) workhouse dietaries; the treatment of the mentally and nervously afflicted, including sane epileptics; the care of pauper children, and workhouse management. Several of his papers in the late-1880s reflect his interest in improving classification of the indoor poor, and during his Chairmanship of the Chorlton Board of Guardians from 1894-8, steps were taken to establish three institutions — Styal Cottage Homes for workhouse children; Tame Street Institution for tramps and casuals, and Langho Colony for Sane Epileptics, near Blackburn.

The first Poor Law question which Rhodes addressed was that of workhouse diets. He set out his observations in a pamphlet of 1884 and in a conference paper in 1886. The papers demonstrate his interest in the *minutiae* of workhouse life. Rhodes had discovered that the amount of food varied greatly from workhouse to workhouse, the suet pudding between eight and twenty ounces a day, for example, and the meat between three and six ounces a week. While the deserving poor merited improvements in their diet and the nation's 200,000 indoor paupers had to be kept in good condition if they were to join or rejoin

the workforce, he felt that "the condition of the hanger-on should never be better than that of the man on whom he hangs". With this proviso the dietary should be rationalised, not only for the sake of the ratepayers, but also for the "aged, the sick and the unfortunate little ones" whose necessities it was the guardians first duty to provide.²⁸

By 1898, when workhouse food was being widely debated, the Chorlton Board had set its own house in order. For example, whereas the 4,000 or so indoor paupers at Withington Workhouse had received a set ration of bread regardless of their appetite, they could now have the amount they wanted. The wastage used to be nearly a ton of bread per month, which Dr Rhodes thought a scandal when people were starving outside. It was partly through his efforts that the Local Government Board's Dietaries and Accounts Order of 1900, which standardised workhouse rations, came into being.²⁹

Next Dr Rhodes investigated lunacy. Of his 30 papers to Poor Law conferences, 11 concerned pauper lunatics, imbeciles and epileptics. In 1888 in his first paper on lunacy, he raised several points that he would often reiterate. Towards the end of the nineteenth century fears abounded that urban living had led to an increase in nervous and mental disorders — this increase seemed to be borne out in the way that asylums filled almost as soon as they were built. Dr Rhodes believed that the rising numbers of patients were due to reasons other than an increase in lunacy. Among the reasons he gave were that new asylums stimulated demand; that treatment was becoming kinder and people were less unwilling to have their relatives admitted, and that not only were patients living longer but some who might have been discharged were retained as helpers. Above all there was the "mistaken and mischievous" four shilling grant paid weekly to the union for their asylum cases; this encouraged the guardians to transfer patients from the workhouse and meant that some boards of guardians filled the asylums with harmless dements while lack of places forced others to retain dangerous cases in their workhouses. Another concern was that while private institutions like the Royal Albert Idiot Asylum at Lancaster would accept some guardians' cases, they would not take those with fits, and young weakminded epileptics were left bored and unoccupied in the workhouse. He suggested boarding out quiet weakminded people in the community

and advocated the provision by county councils or by combinations of Poor Law unions of cheaper chronic asylums for hopeless cases. He thought that the relatives of patients should contribute what they could and that inebriates who were admitted to the workhouse in *delirium tremens* should pay the full cost of their treatment. Dr Rhodes's papers and his influence on the Lancashire Asylums Board contributed to the Board's decision to reserve beds for chronic lunatics and mental defectives in Winwick Asylum when it was opened in 1901.³⁰

Dr Rhodes had an even more instrumental role to play in making provision for sane epileptics. Epileptics who were of sound mind and capable of work were facing many difficulties during the periods of economic hardship that occurred in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. At the best of times they were not wanted as servants, in factories or in shops; they could not climb ladders, work in transport or with machinery. Such was the prejudice against them that those who did obtain work were among the first to lose their jobs in hard times. When they applied for poor relief they were offered nothing better than admission to overcrowded imbecile wards in 'the house'. Dr Rhodes felt that this was unjust and conceived the idea of a Poor Law 'colony' for epileptic adults and children who were facing problems with employment, education and accommodation. That Milson Rhodes regarded epileptics with a mixture of sympathy, suspicion, and eugenic concern is revealed in an address he gave to a Poor Law conference in 1898. He claimed that the provision of colonies by combinations of unions would be dealing with epileptics in "a more enlightened and liberal spirit", but also agreed with Lombroso (the arch degeneration theorist) that epilepsy and criminality were inextricably linked; described epileptics as "wanderers and encumberers" and a menace to the peace and safety of society; and added, for good measure, that he agreed with recent medical opinion that "of all hereditary factors, except feeble-mindedness, none is so prolific in entailing blight upon succeeding generations as epilepsy". He was sorry that little had been done in Britain and that for precedents they had to turn to institutions "Made in Germany".³¹

By 1898 when Dr Rhodes gave this address, his ideas were beginning to bear fruit and an epileptic colony was being planned by Chorlton and Manchester Unions. Matters might have dragged on

but for the severe conditions prevailing in the City in the bitter winter of 1894-5. Charities and guardians were tried to their limits and unemployed people, led by political activists, besieged the union offices. Vagrants who had flooded into Manchester vainly seeking work were crowded into inadequate casual wards.³² The imbecile wards were crowded and the Lancashire asylums, also full, refused to take any more cases especially epileptics who needed more care and already comprised about 10 per cent of the patients. Contemporaries felt that something had to be done to defuse the situation; to separate those they saw as 'wastrels' from the 'genuine unemployed', and to make provision for epileptics. Chorlton and Manchester Boards of Guardians decided to combine to build a test workhouse and casual wards for the better control of the able-bodied unemployed and a colony for epileptics.³³ It was the first time advantage had been taken of a Local Government Order of 1879 permitting such combinations. A Joint Workhouse Committee was set up in 1897 and a year later opened the Tame Street Workhouse and Casual Wards in the centre of Manchester.

A Joint Asylum Committee, also appointed in 1897, authorised Dr Rhodes, Chairman, and Alexander MacDougall of Manchester Board of Guardians, Vice-Chairman, to visit epileptic colonies in Germany and elsewhere. They were impressed by several of the institutions and returned full of ideas. Initially 'Dr Rhodes's plan' was for 1,000 epileptic adults and children of all mental abilities, but opposition from within the Chorlton and Manchester Boards led to the adoption of a cheaper scheme for 240 sane epileptic adults capable of work. Langho Epileptic Colony near Blackburn was opened by the Earl of Derby in September 1906. Although a few voluntary organisations had established homes and colonies for epileptics, Langho Colony was the first such Poor Law provision and was regarded as a triumph for Dr Rhodes and his team.

Langho Colony (Centre from 1972) closed in 1984, after eight decades of providing care for thousands of people with epilepsy from Manchester and beyond. Dr Rhodes also played an instrumental role in the founding in 1904 of the voluntary David Lewis (Manchester) Epileptic Colony for epileptics above the pauper class and had visited institutions in America in 1901 on behalf of the David Lewis Committee. Dr Rhodes's advice was sought by planners in Leicester and

Glasgow, and in Birmingham where he helped launch Monyhull Colony for Epileptics and Imbeciles in 1908.³⁴

If some of Dr Rhodes's remarks about people with epilepsy sound harsh to modern ears, he was at his kindest when talking about pauper children. He thought it wrong that children should be stigmatised for their parents' fecklessness and sought ways to rescue them from their surroundings. He was especially sorry for children who could never settle into regular schooling because their parents were workhouse 'ins-and-outs'. He pressed for the powers of parental rights to be given to the guardians (as they came to be under Acts of 1889 and 1899): this was justice for the child and would reduce pauperism in the long run. Dr Rhodes claimed it was cheaper to the State to care for and educate a child for a few years than "to allow these 'Divine Fragments', the flotsam and jetsam of humanity, to be swept along in the stream of moral sewage".³⁵ Looking back from the vantage point of 1907 Dr Rhodes was pleased with the improvements Chorlton Board of Guardians had brought about for workhouse children. He had joined the Board at about the same time as the guardians opened a school at Withington. The children were all dressed alike in corduroy with clogs and Scotch caps like prisoners wore and "every button on the little coats was stamped Chorlton Union". Having helped to ensure that the cap went and that the clogs and corduroys followed, Dr Rhodes became one of the promoters of a scheme to take the Chorlton children right away from the workhouse into cottage homes in the country. As Chairman of the Schools and Cottage Homes Committee, Dr Rhodes chose the site at Styal in Cheshire, and in the face of accusations from "guardians of the rates" that the scheme was too costly, helped plan the village for 300 children and officially opened Styal Cottage Homes in October 1898.³⁶ The Homes grew and prospered and, although they had their faults, provided a protected and healthy environment for children until the 1950s.

Milson Rhodes's fourth broad area of Poor Law interest was workhouse infirmaries, including workhouse nursing. In a paper of 1894 on the topic, Dr Rhodes praised the improvements wrought by Florence Nightingale and Liverpool's William Rathbone. He was proud of Withington Infirmary but appalled at conditions prevailing elsewhere. In one workhouse there was a so-called 'earthcloset' (with no earth in sight) near a lying-in ward and a

waterless 'watercloset' which smelt abominably. In another two roller towels did for 30 patients a week and one comb and brush for the entire 230. Wards in many infirmaries were grossly understaffed, crowded, airless, and bathed in that 'detestable odour known as 'institution smell'".³⁷ Dr Rhodes knew precisely what was wanted in the way of heating, ventilation, walls, beds (no feather beds for paupers but at least beds that were long enough and cut straw mattresses), chairs, baths, and so on. When it came to nursing, Dr Rhodes thought that one nurse to every 15 patients, as prevailed in Lancashire, was about right but they should be of the proper calibre. Until 1897 when the Local Government Board banned pauper nursing in workhouse hospitals (although ill-defined 'attendance' was still allowed), pauper nurses made up a large proportion of the ward staff. Dr Rhodes was against sick people being nursed by people who were "incompetent to earn their own living". Most old pauper nurses were too frail for the work; most young ones had led drunken or dissolute lives and were equally unsuitable. He knew of places where the patients were cruelly treated and where bedsores were the norm: for kindly, clean, efficient, and moral care of the sick, trained nurses were a must. The matron should be the trained nurse in charge of the sick not, as in many workhouses, the jumped-up porter's wife turned housekeeper. Dr Rhodes finished by suggesting that senior medical students be allowed into the workhouse wards. The great voluntary hospitals of England and the State hospitals of Europe allowed this but the workhouse hospitals were as closed to observation as if they were "so many Turkish harems". To allow medical students in would break the monotony for the patients; give the students experience in chronic conditions; aid the spread of scientific knowledge, and generate appreciation for the guardians' treatment of the sick poor. Dr Rhodes then put on his guardian's hat and added "If only for the sake of the public good we ought to open our hospitals, so that the ratepayers may obtain some return for the cost in the increased knowledge that will by that means be placed in the reach of their medical adviser".³⁸

The Final years

Although Dr Rhodes sometimes clashed with other members of the Chorlton Board, his colleagues were proud of him and appreciated how he had advanced Chorlton's cause and in 1903 presented him with a gold purse as a token of his 21 years service. In 1907, Dr Rhodes's

neighbours, colleagues, and readers of the *Poor Law Officers' Journal* presented him with a gift of 300 guineas and an illuminated address at a ceremony in the Emmanuel Institute, Didsbury. The report of the event deplored the lack of public honours awarded to Dr Rhodes and other untiring workers for the Poor Law and claimed that nowhere else but in England would Dr Rhodes' work have passed without national acknowledgement and it was time that the notice was taken of the work of "these persistent but retiring men".³⁹

Dr Rhodes had not much longer to live. His heart condition grew steadily worse and he cancelled a trip to a congress in Budapest in case he died there. He was working right up to the end which came suddenly. For two or three years he had taken strychnine as a tonic and during the afternoon of September 25 1909,

feeling unwell but with patients to see and local government work to do, he took a dose to help him carry on. The dosage was too strong and he collapsed and died a few hours later. The inquest verdict was death from misadventure. Dr Rhodes's funeral took place at Emmanuel Church and Manchester Crematorium, both in Barlow Moor Road, not far from his home. Nearly all the shops and houses in Didsbury lowered their blinds and as the funeral procession passed near Withington Workhouse, mourners were reportedly moved to see a number of aged pauper men with their heads uncovered and signs of emotion on their faces.⁴⁰

Dr Rhodes's effects amounted only to £658. His death was widely reported and tributes poured in from all over the country. Some sort of memorial was indicated and there was talk of starting a fund to provide university scholarships

for Poor Law children. His nephew, Russen Rhodes, completed the papers on 'The Poor Law and the medical profession' (for the *British Medical Journal*), and 'Human derelicts' (for the Ancoats Brotherhood), that Rhodes was working on at the time of his death. The family offered Milson Rhodes's Poor-Law library to the guardians and ratepayers of the Chorlton Union, the only condition being that it should be identified with him in some way. What became of this library is a mystery. In July 1910 the Chorlton Board announced that the home for children of ins-and-outs recently erected at Withington Workhouse would be known as the 'Dr Rhodes Memorial Home'. In Didsbury £350 was raised and used to erect the clock tower with which we began this essay. Unveiled in January 1911, it stands to remind the people of Didsbury of a notable Manchester man.

NOTES

1. The Poor Laws constituted the legislative machinery for relief of the poor. The Act in force was the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act (the 'New Poor Law'), which was intended to restrict poor relief by offering only admission to a workhouse where conditions were to be 'less eligible' than those of the poorest working labourer. Poor Law unions, of which there were about 640, were poor relief districts. From 1871, the central Poor Law authority was the Local Government Board in London.
2. B. Webb, *My Apprenticeship* (1938), p.157.
3. E.B. Slater, prizewinning essay (1971) in 'Personal recollections of bygone Didsbury', (a competition organised by Didsbury Library), p.7.
4. Census returns, 1851, 1861. *Who Was Who 1897-1916*.
5. *Register of Electors, Glasgow, 1863-1867*.
W.I. Addison, *Roll of Graduates of the University of Glasgow 1727-1897* (Glasgow, 1898) *Medical Directory, Medical Register*, various years.
6. *Probate Indices*, for 1884, 1885.
7. *Manchester City News (MCN)*, 3 Nov. 1888.
8. *MCN*, 12 Dec. 1896.
9. *Medical Directory, Medical Register*, various years. *British Medical Journal (BMJ)*, 9 Oct. 1909, p.1105.
10. E. France, T.F. Woodall, *A New History of Didsbury* (Manchester, 1976), pp. 82-3.
11. *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 30 Sept. 1907.
12. *MCN*, 4 April 1882, p.7.
13. *MCN*, 28 Sept. 1907.
14. J.M. Rhodes, 'The causes of pauperism', *North-Western District Poor Law Conference (DPLC)*, 1893, p.176. Autolycus, 'A pilgrimage to Cheadle Valley', *MCN*, 2 July 1927 (reference to Robert Blatchford).
15. *MCN*, 29 May 1897.
16. *MCN*, 2 April 1898.
17. J.M. Rhodes, 'Outdoor relief', *North Midland DPLC*, 1892, pp.57-8. *Lancet*, 9 Sept. 1902, p.776.
18. J.M. Rhodes, 'Nursing in workhouse hospitals', *North-Western DPLC*, 1894, p.262-3.
19. The word 'weakminded' referred to the hotch-potch of chronic insane, epileptic, and/or mentally defective people who were accommodated together in special workhouse wards, called, often arbitrarily, 'lunatic', 'epileptic', or 'imbecile' wards. The mentally defective class consisted of (in descending order of mental ability) idiots, imbeciles, or feeble-minded persons.
20. *Lancet*, 15 Sept. 1906.
21. *MCN*, 25 June 1898. J.M. Rhodes, 'Classification of paupers by workhouses', *North-Western DPLC*, 1895, p.278.
22. *MCN*, 19 Jan 1896.
23. R.A. Leach, 'The late John Milson Rhodes, M.D., J.P.', *Poor Law Conference Reports, 1909-10*, p.xxi. (Hereafter Leach, *Poor Law Conference*).
24. *Ibid*, *passim*.
25. J.M. Rhodes and A. McDougall, *The Treatment of Imbeciles and Epileptics* (1898). J.M. Rhodes and E.W. Marshall, *Report on a Visit of Inspection to Colonies and Hospitals for Epileptics, the Feeble-Minded, and the Insane in the United States of America*. (1902).
26. *Manchester Evening News*, 15 Nov. 1904.
27. *British Medical Journal (BMJ)*, 9 Oct. 1909, p.1106; *Manchester Faces and Places*, Vol.5 (1896), pp.139-40.
28. J.M. Rhodes, 'Workhouse Dietaries', *North-Western DPLC*, 1886, pp.298-309.
29. Leach, *Poor Law Conference*, p.xii.
30. J.M. Rhodes, 'Laws relating to pauper lunatics', *North-Western DPLC* 1888, pp.193-212. Proceedings of the Lancashire Asylums Board, Feb. 1901; Aug. 1901. Lancashire's four county asylums accommodated 8000 patients in the 1890s and during Dr Rhodes's time on the Lancashire Asylums Board a fifth asylum was opened at Winwick in 1901 and a sixth (Calderstones) begun at Whalley.
31. Epileptic colonies were rural communities with farms, separate homes, workshops and other buildings. They were either for one sex or kept the sexes apart. Some had a school for epileptic children attached. J.M. Rhodes, 'Combination among unions for the treatment of imbeciles and epileptics', *North Wales DPLC*, 1898, pp.205, 207.
32. *MCN*, 1894-5, especially 3 Nov. 1894, and 2 Feb. 1895 to 20 April 1895.
33. *MCN*, 25 May 1895. Correspondence Chorlton and Manchester Unions and Local Government Board, 1895, Public Record Office, MH12/5747.
34. *BMJ*, 9 Oct. 1909, p.1106. *Poor Law Officers' Journal (PLOJ)*, 7 Sept. 1906; 17 April 1908.
35. Leach, *Poor Law Conference*, p.xx.
36. J. Stanhope Brown, *A Styl of its Own 1894-1964: the True Story of 25,000 Twilight Orphans*, (Manchester, 1989), *passim*. *MCN*, 3 Aug. 1895; 8 Oct. 1898.
37. J.M. Rhodes, 'Nursing in workhouse hospitals', *North-Western DPLC*, 1894, p.255.
38. *Ibid*, pp.262-5, 270.
39. *MCN*, 18 April 1903; 28 Sept. 1907. *PLOJ*, 4 Oct. 1907, p.975.
40. *BMJ*, 9 Oct. 1909, p.1107.