



Gordon Road Workhouse, Casual Ward exterior

Primary Maker

Guy Miller

Medium

Water-colour

Description

In 1878 the Borough of Camberwell built a new workhouse on a site to the west of Gordon Road in Peckham. They held a competition and the winning plans were submitted by the architectural firm of Berriman and Sons Ltd. Berriman's design comprised a central administrative block connected by covered walkways to two dormitory pavilion blocks, or wards. The main workhouse had space for over 700 men and women. Men were mostly employed chopping wood and breaking stones for road-mending and women worked in the laundry. Some men preferred to 'tramp' the country, with the opportunity for occasional seasonal work on the land and in hotels. They only sought a night in casual wards like this when ill or when the weather was too bad to sleep rough. In return for accommodation and food, they were expected to do the same allotted tasks as the regular inmates. Given the opportunity, casuals tended to abscond without completing their task. Under a 1948 Act the National Assistance Board took over the running of many of these casual wards. Up to the 1970s, failure to perform your task was a criminal offence punishable by up to one month in prison. This was usually applied only to persistent offenders. In 1930, the Gordon Road site was taken over by the London County Council and became the Camberwell Reception Centre. The administrative block and the two main dormitory blocks survive and have been converted into flats.

Dimensions

Object/Work: 200 x 280 mm