



**GRESSENHALL**  
FARM AND WORKHOUSE  
MUSEUM OF NORFOLK LIFE

## Murder in the Workhouse Script: Chapters 5 & 6

If you wish to follow the script along with the film, tracking times (approx every 30 seconds) are counted down from >12:21< to >00:00< in **red**.

When there are sound effects, these are highlighted in **green**. Images are noted in **blue**.

>12:21< Start of the film

[music throughout] [image of Gressenhall Workhouse]

[Opening titles (*in italics*) with voiceover from Detective Lightfoot]

*Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse*

*Murder in the Workhouse*

*Chapters 5 and 6*

***This is the fourth in a series of short films looking at life in the workhouse through a murder mystery.***

*Everything you need to solve the murder is contained in these films. You will need a pen and paper to record your observations.*

*A script is available to download if you wish to follow the dialogue.*

*The characters in this mystery are fictitious, as is the murder. However, all other information about the workhouse is based upon historical events.*

>12:18<

### **Detective Lightfoot:**

This is Gressenhall Workhouse. My name is Detective Lightfoot, and I have a murder to investigate.

Oh goodness me, if you have accompanied me this far upon the case you will not need reminding that we are attempting to discover the identity of the murderer of Mr Richard Barker, Chairman of the Board of Guardians at the workhouse.

[Image of Mr Barker]

We have met three of the suspects, and have four more to interview.

>11.52<

## Chapter 5

*Ploughwright, the male inmate*

[Image of Nancy Flowerdew]

### **Detective:**

I left Nancy Flowerdew in the laundry and decided to see who was singing on the other side of the wall.

[Image of laundry yard]

[sound of birdsong]

### **William Ploughwright** (singing):

Then stand to the union for ever  
Three cheers for bold Arch and his crew!

>11:30<

[Image of Greve the Porter]

### **Greve:**

Oi, put a sock in it Ploughwright, you don't want to get into anymore trouble do you? Fancy another day in the refractory cell, now get back to work!

[Image of the men's workyard]

### **Detective:**

I saw a man sitting on a bench in the yard, I asked him what the porter was shouting about.

### **Ploughwright:**

And he talks about *me* being lazy and idle ... ha! When did Greve ever do a stroke of work? He has been hanging about all day.

[Image of Greve]

### **Detective:**

The man introduced himself as William Ploughwright. I told him I understood he had he had been in trouble with the guardians..?

[Image of William Ploughwright]

>10:50<

[Image of boardroom and workhouse corridor]

**Ploughwright:**

They said that I, 'did not keep to the men's ward and wandered the workhouse at night time'

[Image of cell door and corridor]

It was last week, I found the door left open and thought I would go and see my wife, how would you feel, to be separated from your family? Even though we are married, when we come through the workhouse doors...

[Images of workhouse, and male and female inmates]

...the men and women are divided up ... men to one ward, women to another and children to another.

[Images of workhouse chapel]

It is not right, not Christian ... oh, however, families are allowed to see each other for a whole hour after church service on a Sunday.

[Image of Ploughwright]

**Detective:**

I enquired what punishment he had been given.

>10:01<

[Image of refractory cell]

**Ploughwright:**

Three days in the refractory cell, the dungeon, as everyone calls it. Locked in there for eight hours at a time with a little bread and water and a bucket to use, you know, when you need to go.

[images of workhouse illustrations]

You can get sent there for breaking any of the rules – and there are lots of rules - if you keep on breaking the rules you can get sent to prison.

[Image of Ploughwright]

**Detective:**

Ploughwright turned his attention to something in his lap, making short, sharp picking movements with an iron nail. I asked him what he was doing.

[Image of rope, ship, and oakum]

**Ploughwright:**

I'm picking oakum, it is old ship's rope that holds up the masts of sail ships. We have to pick it apart (*coughs*) – then it is sent back to the coast and used to help keep ships watertight – pressed into the gaps between the wooden timbers.

>09:15<

[Image of Ploughwright]

**Detective:**

I commented that it looked hard work.

**Ploughwright:**

[Images of oakum workers, workyard, Ploughwright]

You get used to it ... we have to pick one pound of oakum a day ... it is quite difficult work – first, you have to beat the rope with a hammer to soften it, and then pick it with a nail or spike ... it is hard on your hands, but any farmworker is used to that. The worst thing is when we have to work inside because the weather is bad. The little bits get into your chest and makes you cough.

>08:35<

[Image of hammer]

**Detective:**

I asked him where his hammer was.

[Images of workhouse inmates and prisoners]

**Ploughwright:**

I looked for it this morning but I couldn't find it anywhere. Do you know detective, only two sorts of people pick oakum ... one is the inmates of workhouses, the other is prisoners in prison. That tells you everything you need to know about how the rich feel about the poor – they see as though we are criminals – as though it is our own fault we are in the workhouse.

[Image of workhouse]

**Detective:**

I asked him how he came to be in the workhouse

>07:45<

[Images of farmworkers and tied cottage]

**Ploughwright:**

I lost my job, got the sack ... a farm worker like me- an agricultural labourer- lives in a tied cottage, that means that my home was owned by my boss, so when I lost my job I lost my house and the only place I could go was the workhouse.

[Image of Mr Barker]

**Detective:**

I asked him if he knew Mr Barker.

**Ploughwright:**

Knew him! I used to work for him ... do you know I don't think he even recognised me when I stood in front of the Guardians last night ...

[Image of boardroom and workyard, image of chapel, Nancy Flowerdew]

**Detective:**

I left him picking oakum in the men's work yard. I made my way towards the chapel, where Mrs Barker was said to be. I passed the Boardroom and saw Nancy Flowerdew was there ... she was staring intently at something in her hands. I demanded to see what it was.

>07:00<

**Flowerdew:**

It is nothing, sir, nothing at all ... oh sir, I was not trying to steal it, please sir, don't send me to the prison, I found it under the table, I was going to tell the master, honest I was.

[Image of golden ring]

**Detective:**

She opened her hand ... in it lay a golden ring!

>06:40<

*End of Chapter Five*

>06:25<

*Chapter 6*

*Mrs Barker, the Chairman's wife*

[Image of chapel & wedding ring]

**Detective:**

I found Mrs Barker in the workhouse chapel. I asked her if she had lost her wedding ring.

>06:00<

[Image of Mrs Barker, ring, chapel]

**Mrs Barker:**

Oh, thank you Detective, I must have lost it! It is a size too large you see, and it is always slipping from my finger!

**Detective:**

I enquired as to how she was bearing up after the news of her husband's death?

**Mrs Barker:**

It has been a very great shock to me, Detective, but one endures.

[Images of Mr Barker, Boardroom, Mr Scrivener, Greve]

My husband was a great servant to his community, selflessly spending many hours with the guardians, at meetings of the highest importance- endless troubles with inmates and staff.

**Detective:**

When did she arrive at the workhouse yesterday?

[Image of carriage, workhouse clock, Mr Fuller]

**Mrs Barker:**

I arrived with my husband in our carriage just as the workhouse clock chimed five, and was met by the Master ...

>05:30<

[Image of inmates & Mr Fuller]

**Master:**

Ah Mrs Barker, you grace us with your presence, the inmates do so value your weekly visits. Why, they often say to me... “Lady Barker” -for so they call you- “brings light into our lives ...”

[Image of Mrs Barker, Mr Barker, Mr Fuller]

**Mrs Barker:**

I find the Master to be an impossibly weak man, and I can assure you that my husband also had a low opinion of him. To speak frankly, he was not certain that Mr Fuller was a very good Master at all. In fact, he was considering finding a replacement.

>04:50<

[Image of boardroom, candlesticks, desk]

My husband and I went to the boardroom. He attended to his papers. I remember there was one particular document he seemed especially interested in.

[Image of Mr Barker]

**Mr Barker:**

It is, err, nothing, my dear, now be on your way and make your visits to the inmates, you know they love you so. I have work to do.

>04:25<

[Image of infirmary wing, 'Eventide' (Hubert von Herkomer), medical chairs and equipment, taxpayers]

**Mrs Barker:**

The under-matron accompanied me to the Infirmary- that is the workhouse hospital. It brings tears to my eyes, you know. For the most part they are dear, sweet old folks who have worked hard all their lives, and through little or no fault of their own find themselves spending their twilight years in the workhouse. Truly *they* may be called the *deserving* poor. Of course, we ensure they have the best medical equipment – water beds, propelling chairs and so forth, at great cost to the taxpayer.

But I pray you, do not be fooled! Not all of the inmates are so deserving.

[Image of men's workyard, Ploughwright]

On returning from the Infirmary I passed the men's work yard and heard a tuneless voice over the walls –

>03:30<

**Ploughwright (singing):**

Then stand to the union for ever

Three cheers for bold Arch and his crew!

[Image of Mrs Barker]

**Mrs Barker:**

Singing! Singing in the workhouse, would you believe it? There was something familiar about the voice...

[Image of Ploughwright]

**Ploughwright (singing):**

Don't you think they'll desert you, no never

If you stick to the union true blue!

[Images of farmworkers and union flag]

**Mrs Barker:**

And not just any song - a union song! Whatever next! All around Norfolk the ungrateful farm workers have been joining together into a union. They think that if they demand higher wages together, no farmer can refuse them!

[Image of homeless farmworkers]

My husband is a landowner too, you understand, and we had terrible problems with the labourers on our farm. I regret to say that my husband had to sack a few of the 'bad seeds', and turn them out of house and home.

>02:40<

[Images of farmworkers drinking beer, and workhouse inmates]

People like these- *these* are the undeserving poor – they are poor because they choose to be lazy, idle and immoral. We must be watchful for them at all times!

[Image of Mrs Barker]

**Detective:**

At this point I had to interrupt Mrs Barker, as I feared she would continue until the end of time. I asked her if anything unusual had occurred last night.

**Mrs Barker:**

Unusual, Detective? No, not that I can recall. I went to the laundry and there saw one of the poor women - Nancy Flowerdew - shameful and coarse – and rude, as usual!

[Image of Nancy Flowerdew]

>02:05<

[Image of Mr Barker, Miss Bacon, pot of gruel]

**Nancy Flowerdew:**

Well now, if it ain't Miss High And Mighty ... come to minister to the poor ... now don't you look at me like that *Mrs* Barker – if you want to do something truly good then why don't you ask your husband why he gave that Lizzie Bacon a job ... it certainly ain't because she can cook!

[Image of unmarried mother's ward, beer drinkers, unmarried mother]

**Mrs Barker:**

Of course, the undermatron sent her immediately to the unmarried mother's ward. Another example, detective, of the undeserving poor, taking advantage of our charity.

>01:32<

[Image of Mrs Barker on location on workhouse map, and boardroom]

And I believe that is all. I left the laundry and went to the boardroom to meet my husband at about quarter past eight, by the bell. Oh yes- as I arrived the master was there, speaking to my husband,

[Image of Mr Fuller]

**Master:**

Mr. Barker, I implore you, I do not know how long I can continue in this way!

**Mrs Barker:**

The master left as soon as I arrived. I could tell he was most unhappy.

[Image of Mr Barker and Mrs Barker]

My husband said he had other business to attend to, and we bade each other goodbye- for the last time, I regret to say, although I did not know it then.

I went home and to bed, only discovering that my husband had not returned home when I awoke this morning ... to find ... (*weeping*)

>00:50<

**Detective:**

I gave Mrs Barker my condolences and took my leave. I crossed the courtyard, determined to meet with Greve the porter.

[Image of Greve, ring, Nancy, Mrs B]

As I did so I wondered about Mrs Barker's wedding ring – had it fallen from her hand by accident? And Nancy Flowerdew's question about the cook,

Elizabeth Bacon, what did she mean by it? And lastly, Mrs Barker's tears ...  
were they real?

>00:20<

*End of chapter 6*

*End of film titles*

>00:00< end of film