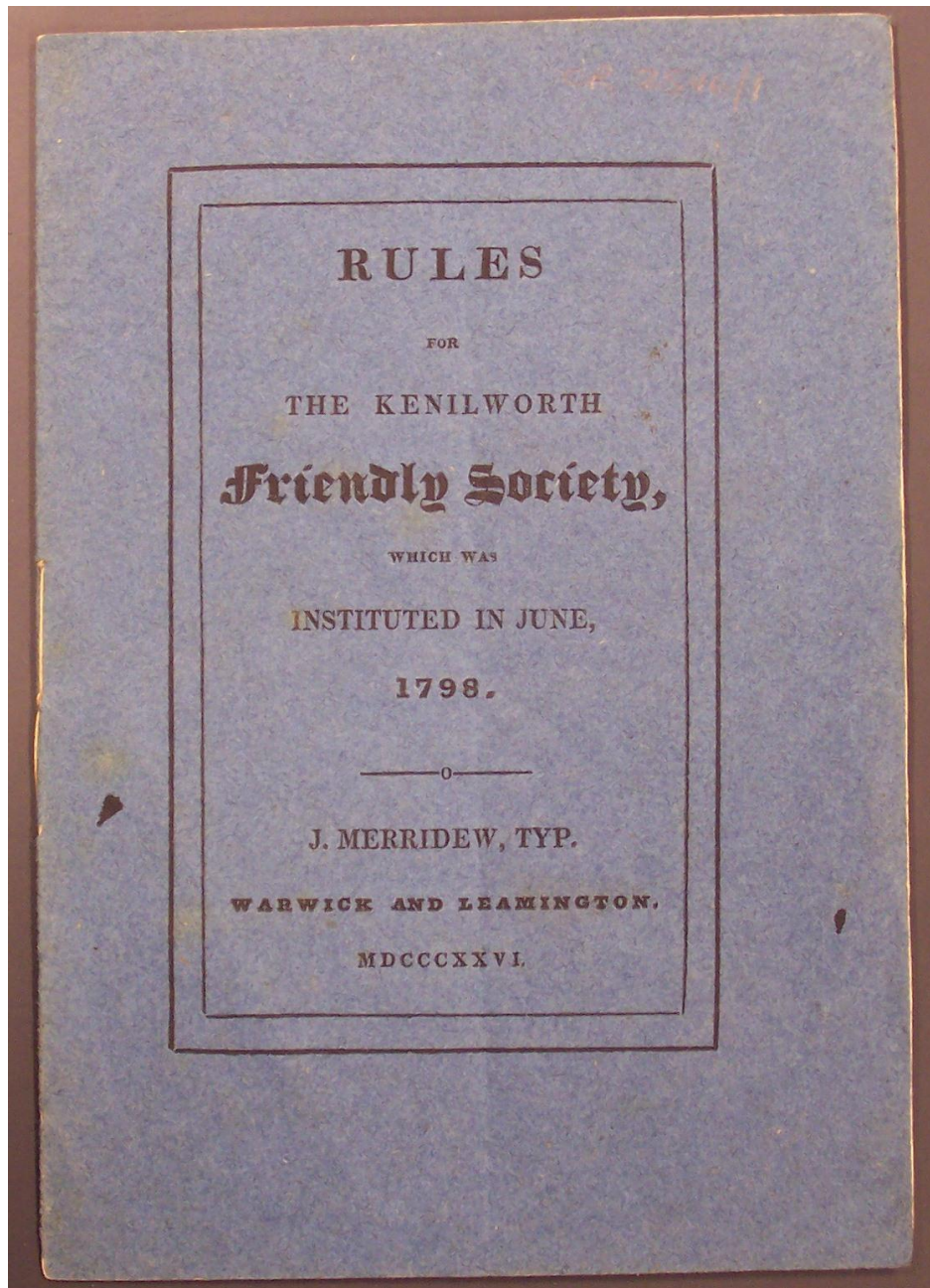


Rules of the Female Friendly Society of Kenilworth, 1826

[CR2546/1](#)



Friendly Societies

Before the emergence of the welfare state, friendly societies provided working people with insurance in the event that they might become ill and unable to work. Each member would pay a fixed amount periodically and would be able to benefit from the fund in times of crisis. The 19th century saw a boost in these societies, and by the end of the century around 30,000 of them were registered.

Female Friendly Societies

Friendly societies were dominated by men, and female friendly societies accounted for a small percentage of the total. In the *Rules to be observed by a society of women, in the parish of Kenilworth, 1798*¹, it states:

'It being usual for men to form themselves into clubs, for their support, under sickness and misfortunes, there seems to be no reason why women who are exposed to equal if, not greater sufferings, should not unite for the same good purpose, and from their own honest industry lay by a trifle for the hour of need'

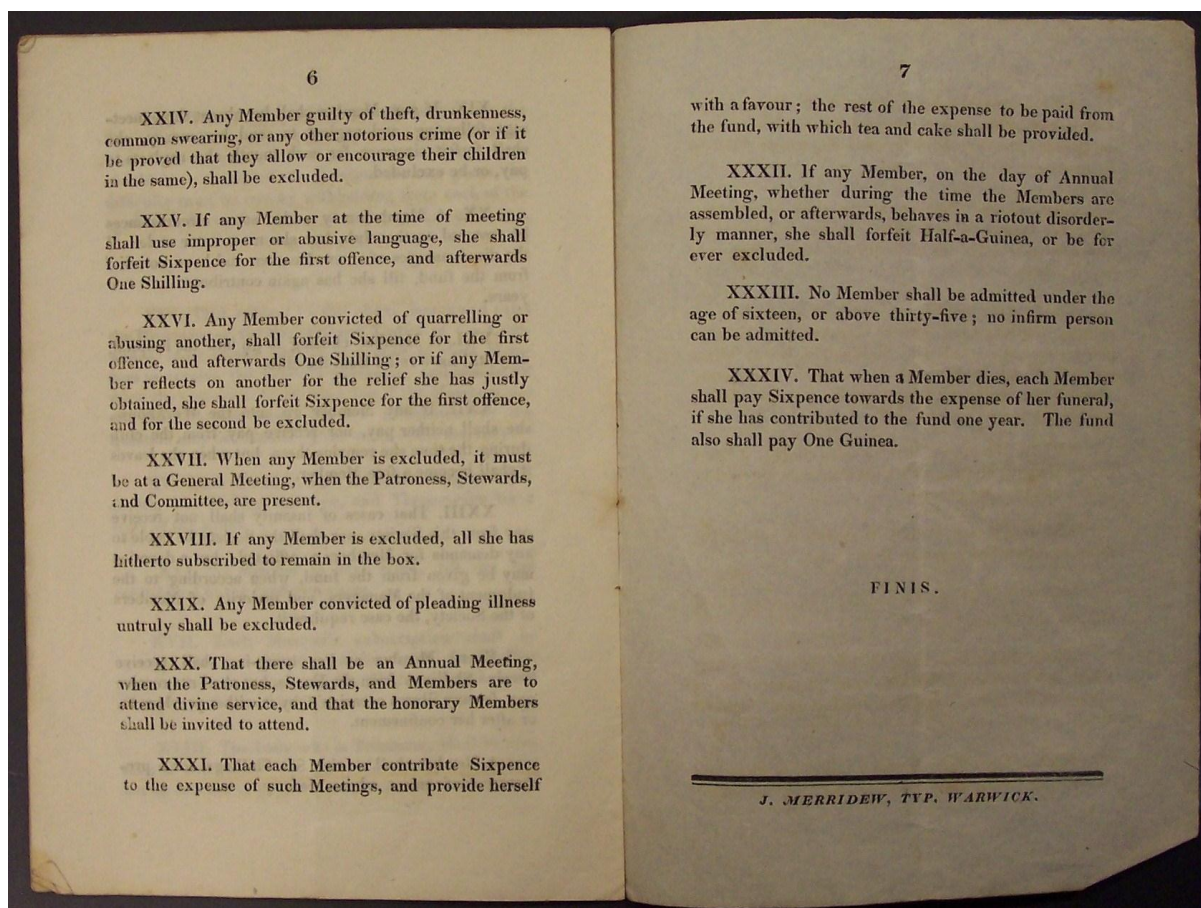
Kenilworth

The Kenilworth Female Friendly society was established in 1798. A sum of £992, 19s and 3d was invested into it by Rebecca Bird, Richard Gresley Esq and Henry Butler Esq. Members paid a 1s entry fee, 3d for a copy of the rules and 6d a month.

Despite the lump sum coming partly from men, the society was governed by females. When the society was opened, two patronesses (treasurers) headed the society and two stewards were responsible for visiting the sick and examining their complaints, as well as bringing the accounts of payments to the monthly meetings.

In 1895, the society had 87 members, each paying 2s 6d a month. However numbers fluctuated and by 1952, they had dropped to six. These were all pensioners receiving £125 per month from the interest.

The society was closed in 1986 when the last member died. The remaining funds were given to the Kenilworth United Charities.



Rules

The earliest surviving minute book in this collection is for 1912, so these rules are the only insight we have into the early years of the society. The rule booklets were bought by each member for 3d upon joining. Every member had to be paying into the society for two years before she could receive any relief, and new members had to be between 16 and 35. The rules of 1826 stated that:

'Every Member really incapable of working, by illness or lameness, shall receive six Shillings per week for four weeks; she shall then receive 3s. per week for 12 weeks, if she continue ill so long [...]

After the 12 weeks, the patroness would judge how much more the woman could receive.

As well as illness, the society provided for women who were lying-in (bed rest after giving birth)², gave a modest pension, and made a contribution to a woman's funeral.

However, the rules were fairly strict. Relief was not given in cases of insanity and pregnancy, and the society discouraged crime, improper behaviour and abusive language. For example:

'Any Member guilty of theft, drunkenness, common swearing, or any other notorious crime [...] shall be excluded'

Additionally, the members who were receiving relief were banned from the following:

'[...] she may not do anything for hire, any out-door work; she may not make bread, wash, iron, sew, spin, knit, or do any household work'

Footnotes

1. [CR2546/61](#)

2. Interestingly, the 1798 rules stated that this money would only be given to a woman who has been married for nine months, whereas these 1826 rules do not specify this.

Bibliography

Gorskey, Martin, 'Self help and mutual aid: friendly societies in 19th century Britain', *Recent Findings of Research in Economic & Social History*, Spring, 28, 1999.

Woodland, Christine, 'Kenilworth Female Friendly Society', *Kenilworth History*, 1988. (F.Ken (P))