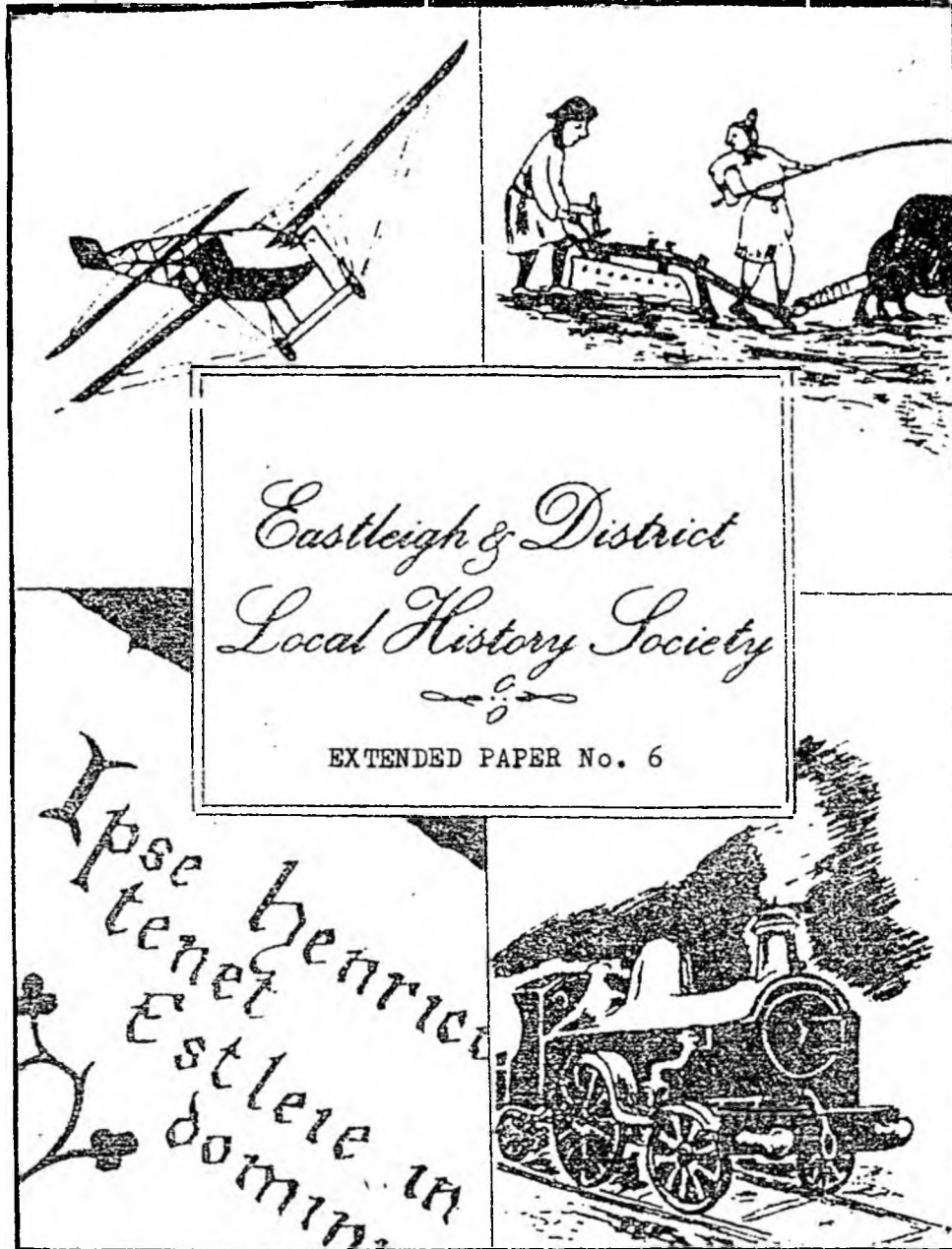


The Poor in Bishopstoke 1770-1834.



Eastleigh & District Local History Society

EXTENDED PAPER No. 6

*Ipse Henricus
tenet Estlere
in dominio*

[No. 41.]
Southampton To wit.
R. B.



Robert Wright }

To William One Dumper
of the Parish
of Bishopstoke
in the said County.

W. W. Wright



WE whose Names are hereunto set, and Seals affixed,
two of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace in and
for the said County
one whereof is of the Quorum, do hereby summon you
personally to appear before us at the *Man de la Sun* *Wiches*
in the said County on *Saturday* the
Eighth Day of *July* at the Hour
of *eleven* in the *fore* noon of the same Day,
to shew cause why you refuse to pay the Rate or As-
sessment made for the Relief of the Poor of the said
Parish for this present Year; otherwise we
shall proceed as if you had appeared. Given under our
Hands and Seals the *twenty fourth* Day of
June in the Year of our Lord One Thousand
Eight Hundred *and fifteen*

THE POOR IN BISHOPSTOKE

1770 - 1834

Introduction

Imagine, if you can, Bishopstoke as it was 200 years ago. The parish then covered over 3,430 acres and extended as far as Fair Oak, Horton Heath, Crowdhill and Fisherspond, yet contained only 746 people, according to a census of 1788, ordered by the Bishop of Winchester.

The majority of these people at this time, before the coming of the railway, would have been farmers and farm workers, for this was an agricultural community. The roads which ran through Bishopstoke village - now called Church Road, Spring Lane and Riverside, would have been dirt tracks, dusty in dry weather and muddy in the wet weather, liable to flood near the river, with no pavements or street lights. Only a few of the houses we see now in Bishopstoke would have been in existence then. Of the several thatched cottages which used to be in Spring Lane, only two remain - numbers 117 and 119. In Church Road the old Rectory was built in 1808, and part of Oakbank was certainly in existence, owned in 1825 by Henry Twynam, though altered and added to considerably since then. Concerning other houses which have now disappeared, we know from the Enclosure map of 1826 that there were about 40 buildings in the village, most of them in the lower end, near the river and the mill. The Manor House was one of these, though no Lord of the Manor ever lived there.

Local Landowners and ratepayers

Until the nineteenth century Bishopstoke could boast of no rich or famous landowners in the parish, no-one like the Flemings or Chamberlaynes of neighbouring parishes. In Bishopstoke the wealthier inhabitants were prosperous farmers, such as the Twynam family, the Wooldridges and Lavingtons. We know something of their lives and affairs from documents in the Winchester Record Office. They held positions of unpaid officials in the Parish, elected by the ratepayers (47 of whom were listed in 1784) at an annual meeting of the Vestry, and they had charge of many of the affairs of the day to day running of the Parish. They were Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor, and their decisions closely affected the lives of the poorest people in Bishopstoke.



From Winchester
Record Office

1825

Enobsewe map.

Bishopstoke Village.

Key

-  River
-  Roads (modern names)
- 581 The Mill
- 584 Manor House
- 589 The Cottage
- 590 The Old Church
- 605 Old Rectory.

To Accompany "The Poor of Bishopstoke."



The Church Rates and the Poor

While the wealthy and important people have left their memorials behind them, in the form of wills, bequests to the poor and letters, information about the poor is often non-existent. Their houses have long since crumbled, they left no wills as they had nothing to bequeath, there are no letters, as most of them were illiterate. We can, however, gain some insight into their lives in Bishopstoke from documents such as the Churchwardens' Rates Book, which lists their names, and the amounts of money given to them to relieve their poverty, the Vestry Minutes Book which records their approaches to the Churchwardens asking for money, and the decisions arrived at by these gentlemen. This was a period when, as a result of various Acts of Parliament designed to keep wages low, labourers were compelled to work for as little money as possible. These wages were then supplemented where necessary out of the Poor rates collected in the parish. The amount of money to be collected from local landowners and farmers was decided by the Churchwardens, collected by them, and then distributed to the poor within the parish as "Relief".

Lists of the poor receiving relief

In the Church Rates Book there is a list for 1794 of 26 people receiving relief. Some names appear on the lists for several succeeding years after this, only being deleted when they died. Ben Parrington (or Paddington as it is sometimes spelt) is on the lists from 1794 until his death in 1833. John Candy is also listed from 1794 to 1833, and William Jackson from 1794 to 1822.

These lists are headed "Quarterage Money given to families that do not receive relief from the Poor House".

I shall say more of this building later, suffice it to say here that it was built in Stoke Common Road in 1793. Families and individuals were either sent to live in the Poor House, or were paid a little, usually 1 shilling (5p) a quarter to help them keep themselves and their families in their own homes.

Examinations of the poor and allocation of relief

To obtain financial help it was necessary to make application in person to the Vestry. Here the Churchwardens and Overseers of the poor would discuss

each case, decide whether to award money, and if so, how much. This was called Casual relief, and was given to people in special circumstances, such as sickness of the bread-winner. The Examinations of persons receiving relief are recorded in the Vestry Minutes Book, and I cite one or two entries as examples -

"5th May 1828 Mrs Payne's husband sick, relief granted while he remains so

Henry Phillips' wife applied, but her husband earns above 9s. (45p) a week, so she is refused."

An application from James Burman was also refused:

"Overseer stated he was out in the mornings getting wood, so not entitled".

Some requests made were for single items -

"7th July 1828 Dame Harding to have a pair of shoes for her child."

Other entries reveal what must have been a very painful situation for the applicant:

"7th July 1828 Dame Harris applied for assistance to pay Doctor's bills, attending her sick child. Mr Light stated the child is dead. He had given 10s. (50p) for the funeral, therefore 15s. (75p) more will be sufficient."

We can only guess at the feelings of this mother, grieving for her child, and with no money to pay for the doctor's bills or the funeral.

There were strict rules laid down which the overseers had to abide by. In a notice of 1826 headed "Hints to Overseers" they are warned: "By law, no person is entitled to parochial relief who keeps a dog or fighting cock."

The result was that a Bishopstoke man called Geoffrey Callan was refused relief - the entry reads -

"He keeps a dog. On getting rid of the dog and applying to the Overseer, work will be found."

Employment for the Poor

Unless illness or old age prevented it, everyone who applied for relief was to be found work. A Poorlaw meeting in December 1823 issued the following

statement:

"Employment must be found for everyone able to work. Grown ups to receive 6d. ($2\frac{1}{2}p$) and boys under 10 years and girls under 12 years to receive 3d. ($1\frac{1}{2}p$) a day".

However, in the neighbouring parish of South Stoneham in September 1822 at a meeting at the Poorhouse, concern was expressed that work was not always easy to find for the poor who applied.

"Several parish labourers now out of work and many more may be in the same situation. It is a matter for serious concern how these men are to be disposed of."

The idea that these men might have to be "maintained in a state of idleness" they stated "cannot be contemplated without Horror and Dismay" (their capitals).

On 22nd September 1828 the Overseers in Bishopstoke reported "More funds needed to meet demand for manual labour; grave-digging, etc. suggested for the following year". "2nd March 1829 John Talbot applied for relief and was ordered to break stones on the road".

The wages and expenditure of labourers

If the amount paid to the poor by the Overseers was $2\frac{1}{2}p$ a day what were the wages paid to those able to find work for themselves with local farmers? We have some details collected by the Rector of Barkham in Berkshire in 1787

"Man and wife with 5 children, eldest 8 years

Weekly wage 7s. (35p) for 8 months of the year with extra 1s. (5p) for the other 4 months.

Wife earned 6d. ($2\frac{1}{2}p$) a week for seasonal work at harvest time, etc."

Children, as well as wives, were expected to work and contribute to the family income from a very early age. We have evidence in Bishopstoke that children as young as 7 years were sent to work for local farmers. A list at the back of the Church Rates Book, headed "Poor children put out" includes the following.

"May 12th 1777 John Collis to Mr. Goff at Mortimer's (7 yrs. 6 mths)"

So 7 year old John was sent to work for Mr. Goff at Mortimers Farm.

"1780 One to Mr. Smith for the Mill age 7 years "

"One to Farmer Twynam for June age 8 years"

No names given for either of these children. We presume that they were boarded and fed at their place of work in return for their labours, though no details are given. This would have relieved pressure on the family at home, with one less mouth to feed, for a while at least.

Details of the weekly grocery bill for a family of 7 are also given by the Rector of Barkham. The total spent was 8s. 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. (45p) and the main items were flour and yeast with 8d. (3 $\frac{1}{2}$ p) spent on bacon and 1s. (5p) on tea, sugar and butter or lard. On the question of diet, the Rector explained that labourers could not afford to buy meat, cheese, milk or beer in sufficient quantity, so a considerable amount of bread was baked to supplement their diet.

The Rights of Commoners

Before the Enclosure Act (1826 in Bishopstoke) most of the villagers would have had access to a small plot of land on which to grow vegetables. If they could afford to keep a pig, this would have been turned out to feed on the common land (provided it was properly ringed) and this also would have added to their diet.

This keeping of pigs on common land caused a certain amount of friction in the parish of Bishopstoke, as is revealed in another of the Parish documents "The Manor Book of Presentments". Local misdemeanours were dealt with at the Manor Court, and the jurors were these same local landowners and farmers, such as the Twynams and Lavingtons. The Book of Presentments records the business transacted at this court and the penalties meted out.

Pigs were supposed to have rings put in their snouts to prevent them damaging the ground by rooting for nuts, etc. So, we have the following entry appearing at intervals from 1707 to 1783:

"No hogg to be turned in to the land or commons without being well ringed." Villagers also had to be reminded at intervals that they were not allowed to turn geese on to the common land.

Certain tenants were, however, allowed to "cut timber and underwood for their use". Peat was also cut, and presumably used for fuel. "Peat pits" in Horton Meadow are mentioned in 1770, 1784 and 1788:

"In common meadow called Horton Heath, divers pits made by cutting peat, very dangerous to cattle" (who presumably fell into them).

Enclosure

After the enclosure of common land in 1826 these rights and amenities were withdrawn. All land within the parish was allotted, after a lengthy enquiry by the Commissioner, to those who had some claim upon it. It then had to be enclosed by fences, hedges and a ditch, the cost being met by the new owner. Where the piece of land was small, and the owner did not have enough money to do this work, he would have to sell the land and hope to find employment with another farmer.

The Houses of the Poor

The Manor Book of Presentments also gives us an insight into some of the housing in the Parish.

The very poorest people would have lived in what we would regard as hovels. These probably would have had walls made of mud with straw mixed in, a beaten mud floor, and paper or rags at the holes which served for windows. The oak framed cottages which survive today, such as those at the corner of Spring Lane, would have been the homes of families of means. The poor would attempt to make a home of sorts by building a hut on a piece of waste ground, in the time before Enclosure.

The most frequently recurring item in the Bishopstoke Manor Book of Presentments is about Encroachment - illegally using, fencing in, or building upon waste or common land. The complaints about this occur throughout the 18th century, as witness the following:

6th April 1775 - "Thomas Powell encroached and enclosed and erected a cottage on the Lord's waste."

The Lord (of the Manor) was the Bishop of Winchester. A penalty of £20 was imposed:

"unless levelled and thrown up before 20th April".

This obviously refers to a structure so flimsy that it would be quickly built and just as quickly pulled down. Occasionally people went so far as to encroach upon the highway itself, as witness an entry for 2nd October 1832:

"The highway leading from Crowd Hill has been encroached upon by the erection of a cottage upon it, and Michael Harding is the occupier thereof, and said Michael Harding be required to take down such encroachment."

Sometimes the jurors relented and allowed an encroachment to remain in the possession of the villager. So, on 1st April 1779, Thomas Powell who, four years previously, had been ordered to pull down his cottage, was given a grant of a small piece of land, presumably that on which this cottage was standing:

"to hold to the said Thomas Powell and his wife for their use and after their deaths for the use of the Parish."

Landlords had sometimes, in those days also, to be reminded of their duty to keep their property in good repair. So we read:

9th April 1788 "Thomas Dumper's house, occupied by Thomas Whale at Fair Oak is in very great decay and dangerous to the inhabitants residing there-in. We amerce (fine) said Thomas Dumper £10."

This house, and others mentioned later, were probably of a more durable construction than the mud huts of the poorest parishioners, as they were considered worthy of being repaired.

The Poorhouse, or "House of Industry"

In 1793 money was raised by loans from local farmers to build a "House of Industry" in which, between 1793 and 1839, when it was sold, the destitute were housed. It was built on a piece of land off Stoke Common Road (now Pendula Way) and the buildings, later converted into cottages, were in existence until the 1960's. On 8th November 1792 a meeting was called at "The George" in Fair Oak, at which a group of 12 local farmers appointed a committee of 8 to deal with the business of buying land and raising money for erecting the building and equipping it to house the poor.

The cost of the building was £570. 16s. 2½d, of which £370 was lent by James Wooldridge, one of the committee.

A list, in the Church Rates Book, of the money spent includes £5. 3s. 3d. (£5 18p) for digging the well and 2s. 3d. (11p) for beer for the workmen.

The inventory of goods bought to equip the Poorhouse includes:

Bedstead and sacking, 27 yards of Scotch sheet, 40 yds. of Hessian at 10s. (50p) 35 yds. of Hessian at 11s. (55p) - (better quality, one wonders, or was the first lot a bargain?)

Iron grate 10s. (50p) and an old grate 7s. 6d. (35p)

(They were obviously out to save money where possible).

The list continues: 2 dozen wooden spoons, 2 dozen trenchers (plates) - but only 1 dozen knives and forks.

2 forms (benches), chairs (number not specified), 1 iron pot, frying pan and skillet, 1 tin tea kettle, 1 new copper tea kettle, 2 buckets, a beer stand, and various other items.

The poor to be maintained in the house - lodged, fed and clothed - had to work for their keep, as is implied in the name 'House of Industry'. The articles of agreement in October 1793 between the Churchwardens of Bishopstoke and a sackmaker of New Sarum in Wiltshire called Samuel Lovedee, and his son, arranged for a payment of £157. 10s. a year to be made to them for feeding and clothing the poor. In return Samuel Lovedee and his son were to have:—

"The benefit and advantage of the work, labour and service of all such poor as shall be chargeable to the Parish". The Churchwardens retained the right to place poor children out as apprentices, and would pay any fees and expenses for them. They were also to supply any necessary medicines for the poor, although the Lovedees had to bear the costs of burying any who died.

The Churchwardens had the right "to enter and inspect the premises and the poor, to see that they are properly maintained." Any complaints made by inmates were to be investigated. It was also laid down that Samuel Lovedee and son "shall every night and morning assemble the poor in the Poorhouse and read to them the proper evening and morning prayers", thus catering for their spiritual needs as well.

"Decent apparel" for the poor is mentioned, but no details given. The Parish records of nearby South Stoneham give us more specific details of how the girls in their Poorhouse were to be clothed:

"All female infants here who have arrived at a proper age to be clothed alike in short gowns of a good and warm material, fitting and becoming to persons in their situation". The final phrase is a good indication of the attitude generally adopted towards the poor. The philosophy of the time was that poverty was a disgrace and could be avoided by hard work. Giving money to the poor encouraged idleness. Fears were frequently expressed also, that taking people into a Poorhouse "encouraged idleness and improvidence."

Witness this extract from a book published in 1797 called "The State of the Poor":—

"If the poor know that in cases of need they will be supported by the Parish, then the need to work hard will be less. If parents know that abandoned

children will be looked after, then more will be abandoned."

Conditions in the Poorhouse were to be made so hard that people would not willingly go there, unless all else failed. In the Vestry Minutes Book we see the following entries:-

5th May 1828 "Mrs Padwick claims for Bastard child of 11 years to come into the Poorhouse and be employed.

Dinah Short to be ordered into the Poorhouse and be employed."

Sometimes they were allowed a choice:-

"Mrs Cargin states she earns 1s. 6d. and 2s. (10p) a week. The Parish consider 6s. (30p) a week sufficient allowance, or she may come into the Poorhouse."

Education

The fact that children had to begin work as early as 7 years to help with the family income, plus the prevailing ideas about keeping people in "their proper station" meant that the poor rarely had the opportunity of getting any schooling. Nor did their "betters" generally consider it right that they should do so. This is shown clearly in a report in 1826 of the "Anniversary of the Hampshire Society for the Instruction of the Poor". This Society, set up to give some rudiments of learning to the children of the poor, had obviously come in for some criticism for attempting to do so.

"The evils that many persons apprehended might result from a diffusion of knowledge amongst the poorer classes were not well founded, for boys were generally removed from school at 9 or 10 years and girls seldom permitted to remain after 11 years. Consequently their requirements were limited to the first steps of knowledge, which however enabled the children to read the Scriptures to their parents in the hour of sickness, when perhaps all other means of religious consolation were out of immediate reach."

Their defence then was twofold: (1) They did not teach the children very much. (2) That little they did teach had a religious purpose.

The Rising Costs of the Rates in Bishopstoke

The annual cost of giving relief to the Poor rose steadily during the final years of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. In Bishopstoke this burden

fell on those 47 ratepayers. The annual cost in the country as a whole was £2 million, while all other expenditure from the rates did not exceed £200,000 a year.

In 1753 Henry Fielding had written in "Proposal for making Effectual Provision for the Poor":-

"The poor are a very great burden and even a nuisance to this kingdom, the laws for relieving their distress and restraining their vices have not answered their purposes and they are at present very ill-provided for".

The rates levied in Bishopstoke rose steadily year by year. Between 1784 and 1794 the rates were listed as being for "Repairs to the Church" usually 1s. (5p) in the £1. The Church Rates Book for 1784 gives a total of £6. 7s. 9½d. (£6.39p), the largest amount being paid by Mr. Woodridge for Stoke Farm - 14s. 9½d. (74p), with other amounts varying to the lowest of 1½d. paid by Mr. John Hill for a field called Hard Halves.

Between 1795 and 1835 the rates were levied for "The Relief of the Poor", at first once a year, then 4 or 5 times a year, rising sometimes to 7 or even 8 times a year. No wonder the local landowners who had to pay them complained bitterly about this, and occasionally had to be chased up for non-payment.

At a meeting of the Vestry on 13th April 1826 there was much discussion about rates and the defaulters. One objector wanted his rates lowered, but was refused.

This led to a proposal that all lands and buildings should be re-assessed for rating purposes, and a surveyor was subsequently appointed to undertake the work. However, this was to be a very lengthy process, with many objections to the new assessments, and many errors made by the surveyor in his measurements. In fact, in the end, Mr. Wooldridge was asked to take over the job, which he did, though not without further objections from those who considered they had been wrongly assessed. In the mean time the rates continued to rise.

By 1831 the largest rate payer was George Atkins, whose rates for Stoke Farm, Manor House, Reves Gore and Breach Farm totalled £16. 0s. 6d. The other amounts listed had also risen considerably, most being in pounds rather than pence. The totals were in the region of £766 for the year.

The Act of Settlement and its effects

One way of trying to keep down the cost of Poor Relief and easing the burden on rate payers was to chase away any paupers from other parishes who showed up,

with the intention of settling down and possibly becoming a charge on the Parish.

The Act of Settlement, passed in the reign of Charles II stated: "every parish in which a man tried to settle could send him back to the parish of which he was a native, for fear that if he stayed in his new abode, he might at some future date become chargeable on the rates."

Even if a man found employment in his new parish unless he obtained a "Settlement Certificate" he was liable to be sent back to his former parish. To obtain such a certificate involved being examined by a magistrate and producing evidence to support the application.

Examinations for Settlement Certificates

Details of one such examination preserved in a document in the Winchester Record Office concerns "Sarah Clarke, widow, who, being duly sworn saith that she is about 76 years of age and was born in the parish of Bishopstoke where her parents were inhabitants lawfully settled as she hath heard and believes, She saith that she married Armond Withic Clarke who hath been dead above 30 years. After his death she hired herself to her brother John Hayes at Bishopstoke at £4 a year and lived with him above 20 years under that agreement as his servant."

Another such document, headed "Southampton", speaks of "George Borman who is about 45 years of age, as he believes." It states "about 17 years ago he hired himself to Thomas Smith of Bishopstoke, miller, for a year for £7 and he continued in the service 2 years longer. He hath a wife named Ann and 3 children, John aged about 13 years who has gained no settlement in his own right, Thomas aged about 9 years who has gained no settlement and Mary aged about 6 years."

It is interesting to note how vague people were about ages, also that the 2 boys of 13 and 9 years had no right to stay in the parish as they were obviously not working.

The costs of examining paupers, issuing settlement certificates, or if their application was unsuccessful, sending them back to their own parish were yet more charges on the rates. An Act of Parliament of 1776 directed that overseers, when writing their accounts, had to specify the amounts spent in "litigations about settlements, removals, appeals and other disputes." The overseers in a Parish where paupers had settled without a certificate would attempt to lay the burden of their support on the parish of their birth, or they would send them home, and attempt to recoup the cost of this journey.

Applications for money made to Bishopstoke Overseers

There is a series of letters in the Winchester Record Office written between 1811 and 1834 to the Overseers at Bishopstoke concerning their parishioners who had settled elsewhere and were in need of relief. At times it seems that the Overseers in Bishopstoke were a little lax in replying to the requests for money, as the tone of some of the letters shows.

1811 From the Overseers at Chichester to Overseers of Bishopstoke awaiting remittance of 23s. 2d. (£1 16p) for parishoners of Bishopstoke John Sim and wife.

"Request to know what you would allow the poor man in future, and am astonished you have neither remitted me, nor informed me what you wished me to give him to keep him from starving he can do nothing for himself. He has met with a bad accident which I think he will hardly survive he broke his thigh which will of course incur considerable expense I will be glad if you will send me the amount due to me."

1815 A letter from West Wittering asks for £5 for rent overdue from a tenant: "he is a very good tenant otherwise, and an industrious, sober man, but his having a very large family to support is his misfortune."

4th July 1818 A letter from the overseer at Farnham concerning "the widow of Geoffrey Brumham, now in this parish in a very ill state of health and upwards of 70 years who has thrown herself on this parish. I beg to have your answer by return, whether you will allow her anything per week, or she must be brought home."

There was obviously no reply from Bishopstoke to this request for money for Mrs. Brumham. A second letter dated 14th August starts in quite a sympathetic vein: "As the old woman is so very attached to this place after living in it for so many years we are very unwilling to remove her." It finishes however: "But if you are determined not to allow her anything I shall bring her home next week." (In other words she will be brought back to you in Bishopstoke, where you will have to support her).

There are no further letters concerning her among this correspondence, so we hope the overseer in Bishopstoke sent some money to Farnham for her support, to allow her to continue to live there.

Another widow - Jane Newman - is the subject of numerous letters between the overseers of Beckenham and those of Bishopstoke. The tone of the letters is again very businesslike. On 30th March 1828 a letter is written to Bishopstoke

asking for payment of £7. 19s. 0d. being relief for the past 53 weeks at 3s. (15p) a week. The letter says: "Widow Newman is an afflicted woman and quite unable to walk without two sticks. Your early remittance of above sum will much oblige." No answer was forthcoming and a second letter says: "We will thank you to remit that sum by return of post or we cannot think of continuing paying the weekly allowance to Widow Newman". This sum must have been paid, as the next letter is dated April 1833, when a request is made for £5. 4s. 0d. for 52 weeks - obviously her allowance has been reduced. However, at the beginning of November she died aged 80 years, and the next letter to Bishopstoke states: "I beg to inform you that your pauper, Widow Newman died on Saturday last rather suddenly. I am requested by the overseers to enclose your account of money advanced for her from March 23rd to November 2nd 1833

32 weeks at 2s. (10p)	£3. 4s.
Funeral expenses	<u>£2</u>
	£5 4s.

which they will feel obliged by your forwarding at the earliest opportunity."

We have to remember that this was a period when there were no widows pensions, no old age pensions, no sickness or unemployment benefits. People too ill or old to work had to apply to the overseers for a measly pittance to try and keep themselves alive, and suffer the disgrace which this inflicted upon them. A large family to support when work was scarce was a burden not a blessing.

Friendly Societies

Attempts were made in some quarters to stimulate the working classes to make some provision for hard times. The First Annual Report of the Hampshire County Friendly Society in 1826 contains the following passage: "We would earnestly entreat all who have the means of inducing the working classes to become members of this institution to exert their influence by explaining to their servants the advantages of making a provision for sickness and old age. The more the peasantry are raised above the necessity of depending on parish relief for support by accumulating a fund of their own the better servants they will make."

They do not, however, explain how a farm labourer with an income of 35p. a week, and that only seasonal, will be able to save anything from it to contribute to a Friendly Society.

Labourers injured at Work

No compensation was available to those who sustained injury at work. This is well illustrated in a series of letters concerning Richard Woods. In 1833, while working in a mill at Havant he "received a very serious injury in his leg being caught in the machinery."

The mill owners wrote to the overseers in Bishopstoke on 1st May as follows:

"We are sorry to say he appears of a very nervous nature - so much so that we have been afraid it will be necessary for his leg to be amputated being now destitute of the means of a living (for the present) for himself, wife and three children, he is under the painful necessity of applying to you for weekly relief. This will only be for a time as we will take him into our employ again if he recovers."

The following month the request is backed up by a letter from James Hicks, surgeon:

"It is highly necessary he should have every kind of generous diet, which I find from the weekly allowance he receives he is not able to procure."

In February 1834 he is sufficiently recovered to return to Bishopstoke with a letter from his former employers, the mill owners, recommending him as "a sober, industrious honest and well disposed servant, and if he is allowed to return (to Havant) we, on his recovery and being fit for labour will have no objection to employ him again."

The overseers of Bishopstoke then sent him back to Havant apparently without any money for the next letter to them in March runs as follows:

"I am rather surprised and disappointed that you should return the family here without making some provision for them, as you must be aware that the man in his present state is not able to support his family. I therefore hope that you will immediately send a remittance, as the man is without the means of procuring food.

"I know the family has been a great expense to you but you must know it was unavoidable and I cannot avoid stating that Mr. Scovill (overseer at Bishopstoke) has not acted according as I expected he would, nor as he would like to be done unto.

Your immediate attention to this will oblige.
Yours respectfully H. Scott."

We cannot but feel sympathy for Richard Woods sent back and forth between Havant and Bishopstoke probably in the uncomfortable cart of the local carrier, suffering what was obviously a severe injury, unable to support himself or his family, while the officials of the two parishes argued about whose responsibility he was.

His former employers obviously did not consider themselves under any necessity to contribute anything. They had allowed him rent for his house but threatened to withdraw this help also, in a letter of 22nd March.

"He has been forced to get into debt for bread to eat and is still unable to work. We hope to take him into our employ again in about 6 weeks. We have given him his house rent ever since his accident. Now we assure you that except the man and his family are immediately relieved we shall insist upon his leaving our house immediately, and he must go home to you as we will not employ him any more. We think if you were to give the man about £5 (for 10 weeks) it will be as moderate as you can expect. Without that relief you will please prepare to receive him and his family the middle or end of next week."

As this is the last letter we have about him we must hope this matter was finally settled to the satisfaction of all parties, especially Richard Woods.

Some undeserving Poor

Not all the poor were such deserving cases, however. On 6th April 1818 a letter is addressed from Portsmouth Gaol from Thomas Tolfrey, requesting money for his wife and two children. His plausible tale is worth quoting:-

"About three weeks ago, as I was going to sell some lead for another man, I was stopped by an officer, and the lead being marked unknown to me with the king's mark, he charged me with having stolen it. I was committed to gaol and being very unfortunately unable to clear myself, I was sentenced to 4 months imprisonment."

A month later he writes again for help saying:-

"My wife is near laying in, if she has no relief she must become troublesome to the Parish as she can neither work or has any means to support herself."

The language and handwriting of these letters are such that we presume they were written for him by someone of good education, he probably being unable to write himself. There are no further letters so we presume that the matter was dealt with.

Crime and Punishment

The belief that "idleness generally leads to the commission of all sorts of crime" was as firmly held at that time as it is now. Hence the recurring statement that "work must be found" for the poor. Moreover penalties for what we would consider

to be petty crime were extremely harsh. At the Winchester County Bench 20th August 1825 "2 boys from Bishopstoke were this day convicted of stealing apples from the House of Industry at that place and were saved from imprisonment by the immediate payment of damages and costs."

Should an impoverished labourer seek to add to his larder by poaching he faced 3 months imprisonment if caught. A House of Commons Committee discussing the Game Laws in September 1828 commented:

"There has been of late years a vast profusion of game exposed to the eyes and appetites of a poor and sometimes suffering class of people. No wonder ... that pheasants and hares should be carried off when it is considered that the labourers have a notion that taking a pheasant or a hare is no moral offence."

A suggestion was made to employ poachers on the treadmill, but the committee suggest it would be preferable to order imprisonment with hard labour, instead of the present penalty of 3 months imprisonment.

Therefore at a petty sessions on 6th August 1829 William Goswell was "committed to Bridewell at Winchester to 3 months hard labour for "angling in daytime in water the private property of William Chamberlayne."

18 August 1825 Captain Jarvis of Fair Oak, then part of the parish of Bishopstoke issued a warning to would-be trespassers on his lands that:

"spring guns and dog spears are placed in the woods" and offered a reward of 5 guineas to anyone giving information leading to a conviction "of persons committing any depredation on the said estate."

The theft of items other than food was also harshly dealt with. On 10th November 1827 Samuel Witcher was committed to the County Gaol for "entering the house of Isaac Beckley at Bishopstoke and stealing a handkerchief and other articles." Although a seemingly minor offence, this was probably not his first conviction, for at the Hampshire Lent Assizes the following March he was sentenced to 7 years transportation. "5th April 1828, James Witcher, sentenced at our last Assizes to 7 yrs. transportation has been removed from our gaol and put aboard the Leviathan Hulk at Portsmouth."

Nor is this Bishopstoke's only link with the convict settlements "down under". Eight years after James Witcher's transportation the Vestry was considering the application of Mrs. Primmer for money "to emigrate with her family to her husband in Van Diemen's Land." It was proposed that £20 should be apportioned out of the Poor Rates and this was passed.

Benevolence

If the general attitudes of the time towards those unfortunate enough to fall on hard times appear to us unduly harsh, there were people in the parish who attempted to help. At Christmas time in 1824 the Rector of Bishopstoke, the Reverend Thomas Garnier, gave 2 fat oxen to the poor, while his wife gave a quantity of clothing and coals. While in neighbouring parishes: Mr. Fleming in April 1820 "distributed to 3,047 individuals a quart loaf and a pint of beer each; and Walter Smythe "bequeathed 100 guineas to the poor of the parish of Twyford to be applied to the purchase of coals."

Charitable trusts were already in existence in Bishopstoke such as that set up in 1632 by Richard Dummer, who left a piece of land to provide 40s. (£2) annually "for the use of the poor at Easter and Christmas."

"The Poor are always with us"

We may be tempted sometimes to think that things do not change very much. Human nature remains the same, and some of the stories revealed by the records touch a chord of recognition. Thomas Tolfrey's story of how he came to be in possession of stolen lead could have been told by a twentieth century criminal attempting to clear himself of the charges.

However, when we examine the attitudes of people two hundred years ago to those who had to apply for help from the Poor Rates, we realise just how much has changed. The great reformers of the Victorian age began the work of relieving the lot of the underprivileged. Children were no longer expected to begin work at the age of 7 or 8 years, and education was gradually extended so that only a tiny minority of the population is now unable to read and write.

One of the results is that through newspapers, and even more so, through television, people now can learn more about events in countries on the other side of the world than people in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in Bishopstoke knew about their neighbouring parish. These same **sources** show us the kind of poverty in third world countries now, which was present in our own parish two hundred years ago.

We therefore have some reason to be glad that we live in the age of Elizabeth II and not the Georgian era.

Joan Simmonds
October 1988

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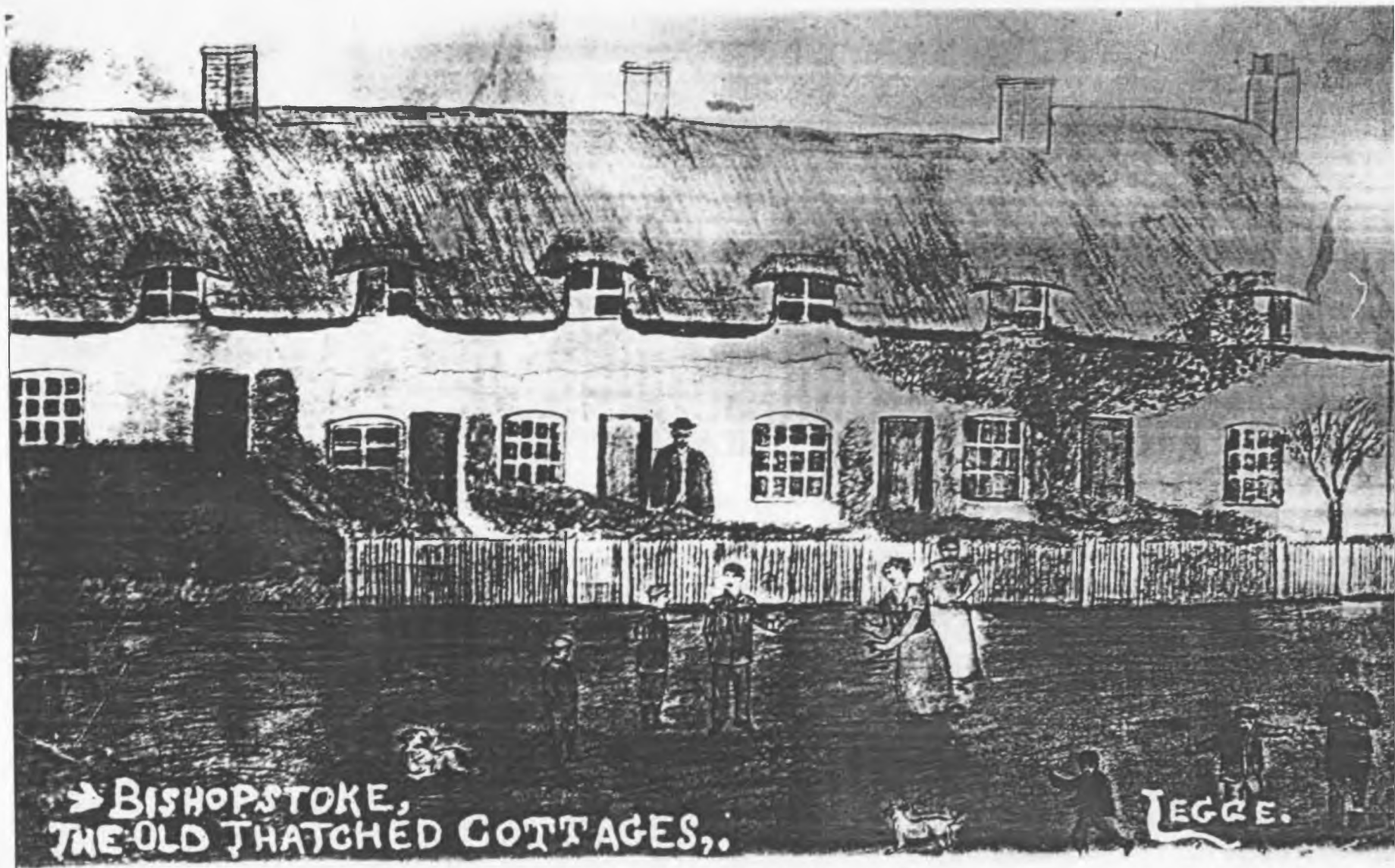
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BISHOPSTOKE OLD POORHOUSE

by V. W. B. Hiscock



From Hampshire Museum Service.

To Accompany "The Poor of Bishopstoke".