

'AIN'T THERE NOBODY ILL AT THE ALMSHOUSES?'

Pensioners occupying the Campden Almshouses had many benefits, but there were also some potential pitfalls, particularly for wives living there.

Sir Baptist Hicks built the Almshouses at the same time as his mansion: they are referred to in a letter from Augustine Jarrett to Sir Baptist dated 20th January 1614 when he wrote, "*like yourself and a worthy gentleman whose good works remain with us, witness the **Alms house**, the bell and the pulpit and the gift u bestowed of the vicar.*"

The dwellings would have been occupied immediately by six poor men and six poor women, as Sir Baptist Hicks specified in his will of 1629, when he said:

And I do also give and bequeath the sum of £140 per annum for ever taken out of all my lands and tenements in Charingworthfor the yearly repairing of an Almshouse which I have erected near to my house in Campden, and for the maintenance and relief of six poor men and six poor women which are now living there

And to such end as that every one of the said poor men and women may have their allowance paid them weekly after my death

every one of the said twelve poor people shall have 3^s 4^d paid them weekly and every of them a frieze gown every year and a ton of coals yearly and every one of them a felt hat yearly

And that the said poor people shall be from time to time placed in the said Almshouses by the nomination of my heirs and their successors and be chosen out of the town of Chipping Campden and Burrington in the parish of Campden

The pension was sizeable, 3s 4d, equivalent to three days work by a skilled tradesman and more than a weeks' pay for a labourer. The ton of coals could be supplemented by wood gathered from the woods around the town. A frieze gown and felt hat provided annually was also very generous, as many poor people had hand-me-downs and made do with one hat all their lives. Very few other almshouses provided a new gown each year.

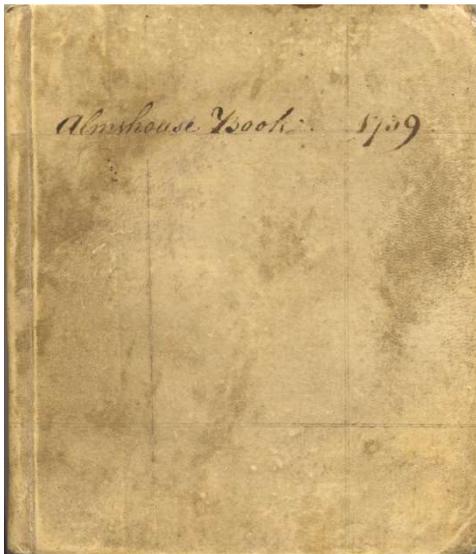


'Gown' here means a cloak, designed to show uniformity when the almspeople paraded to church or went along the street. Frieze is a coarse woollen, plain weave cloth with a nap on one side, similar to baize.



Country people would have worn these clothes and probably the men wore the breeches and jacket every day with the gown on Sundays or for walking along the street. They must have looked so different to everyone else when they were wearing their gowns.

Rules of the Almshouses



The Admissions book is a valuable source of information; it was started in 1739 but at the front is a statement dated June 1744 by the then Earl of Gainsborough, which includes these rules:

4th I do order and appoint that none of the said persons either men or women shall admit any inmate or Dweller with them in their said houses or apartments any other then (than) shall be deemed absolutely necessary to their aid and assistance and as such adjudged and Certified by the ministers of the parish of Campden and Church Wardens of the same.

5th I do order and appoint that none of the said poor pensioners either men or women shall marry after they are admitted into the same House, should any such marriage be contracted the place of such man or woman shall immediately be void.

Lastly I do order and appoint as far as in me lieth that the Pensioners of the above said Hospital do and shall behave themselves soberly quietly and devoutly that they may deserve the continuance of my favour in the said House and keep up to the good Ends designed by my great and good predecessor.

The rules were quite stringent – but how were they interpreted?

It is quite clear that the pensioners were expected to live alone, yet the censuses from 1841-1911, show that there were families living there - sons and daughters, grandchildren and of course wives. Had this always been the case?

Who actually lived in the almshouses?

There were no censuses for the early days, so the parish records have to be used to try to recreate families. Marriages may have taken place in the bride's home church, and not locally, but some conclusions can be made from baptisms, marriages and deaths:

The first entry in the Admissions book is that of Elizabeth Handly in July 1739 and the signed/marked statements by each incoming Almsperson continue until 1876, followed by other records to the mid 1900s.

Be it remembered that I John Wiggett being put into the almshouses at Campden in the room and place of Rd Chamberlain Deceased for one year and so from year to year so long as I shall behave myself well Do hereby promise and agree with The Right Hon The Earl of Gainsborough to submit to obey and abide by the rules orders and constitutions of the said almshouses and not to keep or entertain any dweller or dwellers in my apartment of the said almshouse without a licence obtained from the said Earl of Gainsborough or his Steward for the time being for so doing upon pain of forfeiting my weekly allowances to the poor of Chipping Campden for every and each weeks offence contrary to the above mentioned agreement.

Witness

Witness my hand

John Wiggett (Wigott) went into the Almshouses in 1748

No marriage was recorded but 'Sarah wife of John' was buried on 17th February 1761 and John was buried on 28th June 1761. Presumably Sarah with also living in the Almshouses, providing necessary aid and assistance as specified in the Rules!

Another pensioner listed in the Admissions Book was **Throckmorton Watts**, admitted in 1756, and the burial of Ann wife of Throckmorton appears in the parish register on 17th August 1760, followed by his death in December 1769. Further proof of their marriage comes from the settlement certificate records of 1706, when he was given permission to live in the town to follow his occupation as a flaxdresser.

Joseph Allen married Elizabeth Davies on 6th June 1759 and he, with Elizabeth doubtless, went into the Almshouses in 1796. Elizabeth Allen was buried on 23rd Feb 1802, age 72, and Joseph was buried on 11th Feb 1805 age 78.

It would appear that it is quite reasonable for husband and wife to be admitted - but not wife and husband!

In the women's end of the Almshouses we can be fairly sure that it was only women, although they may have had younger members of the family to look after them. Now a further question needs to be addressed – in the previous examples the wife died first and husband stayed on – what happened if the husband died first?

Charles Taylor married Dorcas Adams on 4th Jun 1762.

He is admitted to the Almshouses in 1803, presumably with Dorcas, who was left a widow in August 1810. Two weeks later Richard Dyer is recorded as moving in to the Almshouses '*in place of Charles Taylor, Deceased*'.

Dorcas Taylor couldn't stay and there were no spaces in the women's end. It is possible that she moved in with her son Nathaniel who, according to the parish records, had a wife Jane and four daughters. Dorcas died ten years later, aged 86 years.

This seems to have been a common occurrence, causing some distress to the widows. One final example is aided by the introduction of the censuses in 1841 and the Vestry Minutes. The Vestry was a group of ratepayers (men) who organised the collection of the poor rate and disbursed it as relief to applicants.

In 1845 **Richard Petty** was admitted to the Almshouse, and he is listed in the 1851 and 1861 censuses with Sarah his wife.

Richard was buried on 7th Dec 1865 and a new man was admitted on 18th Dec. so after twenty years in the Almshouses, Sarah was out, just before Christmas.

In the 1871 census she is shown to be living in the High Street with her son Charles and his wife Mary. Charles is listed as a fruiter. Sarah is described as a pauper. Not only did she lose the material benefits of her husband's pension and fuel but she was also reduced to applying for poor relief, with a significant change to her status. She was buried 3rd Dec 1880, age 83.

Clearly only widows and spinsters could live in the women's end and it was unlikely that a place would become free at just the right moment. It must have been hard to be turned out of the Almshouses at the age of 75, after living there 20 years, and then to be classed as a pauper.

The custom of married couples occupying the Almshouses in the name of the husband only – in the men's section – continued until the 1960's.

Provision of poor relief

The Vestry Minutes provide more information on another aspect of this position against women, the provision of poor relief in the town.

Francis Standley was married in 1783 to Ann Davis: no children recorded in the baptismal register. In 1822 he applied to the Earl of Gainsborough for a place, with a petition signed by 25 of the principal men of the town, including the Earl's Estate Steward who was a Vestryman:

The humble petition of Francis Stanley sheweth that he is by trade a Flaxdresser and has lived in credit for a number of years but through the decay of trade and infirmity he is now reduced to the necessity of being beholding to the Parish for relief, and an almshouse being now become void by the death of John Holtom he humbly hopes you will have the goodness to place him therein and your petitioner will be in duty bound ever to pray for you and yours.

His wife Ann presumably joined him and they will have shared the 3s 4d weekly pension. Yet on 18th May 1824 a record in the Vestry Minutes shows that Francis Stanley's wife had applied for a pair of shoes and was allowed them. It seems surprising that she was allowed poor relief when living in the Almshouses. In April and May 1826 Ann Stanley applied for further relief but it was not allowed.

Francis Stanley died in August 1831 age 74 and Ann Stanley was buried 31st May 1836, age 82 – again she must have been evicted on his death as there is no record of her living in the women's end.

And what of the gown and hat?

In the Exton Archives (the archive of the Gainsborough family, held in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Record Office - LLRRO) there are some receipted bills:

21st February 1750

Recd of Robt Hands the sum of one pound four shillings for making twelve hospital gowns for the year 1750 recd by me Jonathan Hewins his mark

25th February 1750

Recd of Robt Hands the sum of two pounds for twelve hospital hatts for the year 1750 recd by me Edw. Walker



Clothes worn in 1850

The gowns and hats were only provided for the twelve named pensioners, so what did the wives wear? Perhaps they did not parade to church with their husbands but joined the congregation separately. But with one new gown provided every year, maybe they had the cast-offs - it seems highly unlikely that a best gown would be worn out in a year, particularly as these are 'cloaks' not clothes. The hat could be passed on as well. Was that approved by the Earl of Gainsborough's Steward who was in charge of the Campden estate?

So when their husbands died, the widows were evicted within a month, they lost the shared pension, they may have had to hand back the cast-off clothes (or not), they had to find somewhere to live and, perhaps most importantly, they lost status.

Josephine Griffiths

In recent times there are some reminiscences that add more to the story of the women who lost their position.



Josephine Griffiths was born in 1864, the daughter of the local solicitor, and lived in Campden all her life, although she travelled abroad as a young woman. She left journals and sketches and her stories about local people have given us some rich memories.

Later on, Noah Beale, a gentle, fragile old man, came to the Almshouses, where he and his wife lived for some time. She was a large, buxom lady, and looked after him well; while he, handy in the garden, and tending gooseberries and currant bushes, gave no satisfaction to his wife, when the result of his labours was gathered in.

But during last summer [1906] they were there, all this came to an end; for Noah passed on to the Better Land, when the sun was shining brightly, and the fruit in his little garden just ripened to perfection. Mrs Beale was greatly upset, and full of sorrow for her loss. But, in spite of her grief, could not resist remarking to a neighbour: "How thoughtless it was of Noah to die just as the currants want picking". As the Almshouses had been Noah's, and in the men's section, Mrs Beale had to leave after her husband's death. She moved to her daughter's house at Broad Campden, where she was well cared for, and looked after.

Yet, in spite of her good home, and creature comforts, her longing eyes looked ever, towards the Almshouses; where she hoped a vacancy would soon occur, which she herself, might possibly fill. "Ai'nt there nobody ill at the Almshouses"? she would ask, every time I went to see her. "No", I told her. "They are all quite well". "Ai'nt Esther Kyte ill?", she enquired anxiously; "her close on a hundred?". "No", I replied," she is quite all right". "Ah, she murmured despairingly, "There ai'nt never no deaths at the Almshouses".

Mrs Beale died in 1914 in Broad Campden, she never got back to the Almshouses.

The last couple to live in the Almshouses were George and Sarah Bickley, who both died in the late 1970s. By this time the Almshouses Trust, chaired by the Earl of Gainsborough, managed the housing provision, and times had changed: widows were no longer evicted to live out their days elsewhere.