

A Smock and a pair of shoes

By the early 1800's the poor law system which had been in operation for 200 years was coming under pressure nationally with increasing demands on it, with the cost of the Napoleonic Wars and help needed for disabled soldiers returning home and unable to work. In the rural areas the Enclosure Acts, which lost the common land on which the cottagers depended, had a real impact, though it has been argued that new jobs were created by the landowners. The settlement law which required paupers to live in their parish of birth or acquired settlement, through apprenticeship etc, made it difficult for unemployed people to move to the towns to look for employment. Out-relief, that is, the allowance paid to supplement other income and keep families out of the workhouse, was abused in the infamous Speenhamland case, where farmers deliberately paid low wages knowing that parish relief would top it up.

There were also debates which have gone on through the centuries about underlying philosophy and intention – the distinction between the 'deserving and the undeserving' poor. So in the early 1800's there were increasing numbers of unemployed and homeless people. The Poor Rates, which financed local poor relief, were in fact a property tax and those households that paid this objected to the increasing amount that they had to pay.

Campden Vestry

It was the Parish Vestry who controlled poor relief, and many other aspects of town life. Our CADHAS Book 'Campden: A New History' says

'the town itself was run by an oligarchy of its more prosperous residents – tradesmen and shopkeepers – watched over with varying degrees of enthusiasm and diligence by the Gainsborough agent.' The local vicars were also of great importance in the Vestry.

They raised the local rates and decided how the money was spent locally. They took turns to be Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor, responsible for carrying out the decisions of the Vestry. It is the Overseers' Accounts and the Select Vestry Minutes that form the basis for much of our information about looking after the poor. In 1818/19 the rate was 6d. in the pound and at this time the Vestry decided that not enough money was being raised to cover the rising costs of poor relief; hence the decision to commission a new rate valuation survey which was implemented with an increased rate to 1s. in the pound, but this was still much less than in other parts of the country. This rate remained constant until Shipston Union took over.

In 1822 the General Vestry appointed eight men in addition to the incumbent, Rev. Otway Wilson, to serve on the Select Vestry, according to a new government law, and they would meet weekly to administer the poor law. The numbers increased in subsequent years. Propertied women were not specifically excluded in law but there is no record of their participation. Some women were substantial property owners: the Misses Cotterell lived in the highest rated property in 1821 (£26.5s) and Mrs Bricknell owned eight cottages that she let out, although she is not recorded as an

occupier in the town. The following references now are to the Select rather than the General Vestry, detailed in the churchwardens Accounts.

Families seeking help

This second page of the first Minute Book in 1822 sets the scene for the entries that follow and gives us a start on the stories of the people who regularly sought help. James Dunn, Richard Blakeman, Richard Cooper.

Richard and Lucy Blakeman appear at the start of the records and continued to request help until 1836, and possibly beyond, but sadly we don't have records of the decisions for individuals made by the Shipston Union Guardians.

From the parish registers Richard and Lucy had seven children between 1814 and 1828. In March 1822 Richard applies for an 'additional' allowance of 1s weekly in consequence of having an idiot child: this implies that they were already receiving outdoor relief. The following month he asks for 6d allowance (not allowed) and in July for a bed (not allowed) This was pushing it a bit, but two months later Lucy appeared before the Vestry to ask for an increased allowance due to her husband's confinement – I assume he was not having a baby! Finally in December he asked for a smock and was awarded 3s. So they applied 4 times in the year.

Moving forward to 1826, in April Richard applied for shoes for their daughter (allowed), and in July Lucy asked for the continuation of 1s relief, (allowed) which may be the extra for the imbecile child, followed in September by a smock frock for a son (allowed), as was an advance of 8s in October. But she overreached herself in the next month because her request for bed ticking (probably to make a straw palliase) was not allowed. Then she ends 1826 by asking for a loan of 10s. This was referred to the Overseers to the Poor, who administered poor relief – this was a common practice as they knew the situation of the various families. The 'loan' is interesting as it implies money towards doing some work?

The applications continue each year - In December 1829 Lucy applies for 5s a week during the winter and this is allowed – an indication of the poor relief allowance at the time. In 1830 they made six applications for relief in addition to their regular allowance: All of these were made by Lucy – It is noticeable that wives appeared many times before the Vestry – did the families think that the vestrymen would be more lenient? Again, in Dec 1830, Lucy made an unsuccessful request for 'some wrapping to make a bed tick with'. Towards the end of the records in 1836 we find Lucy applying for extra money for being 'nurse to John Harris wife' and a smock for her son, being allowed 2s.

From the census records which started in 1841, Richard, 55, is an Ag Lab – and Lucy and four of the children, now adult, were all employed as silkworkers. So --- were they still claiming poor relief from the Shipston Union, and were they silkworkers in the earlier years, with their income supplemented by poor relief – we shall probably never know. By 1851 the silk mill had closed down. John had joined his father James

as a Farm Lab, two girls had left home and Lucy is listed as Domestic Duties – was this for someone else?

But this story highlights a number of issues for poor families

- ‘Economy of makeshifts’ – not relying just on the outdoor relief but combining it with other forms of income. ‘Taking in each other’s washing’. New thinking from academics, also a greater recognition that we should not be considering the man’s income alone – that wives made a significant contribution to family income.
- A large number of regular applications – were they trying it on, and were they using the extras to generate income – eg bed ticking.
- Local knowledge of the Vestrymen – they must have known the background to the families, were they judgemental? How were they influenced?
- Helping people to work
- Paying for community care
- Kinship support

Another story covers some of these points:

Sarah Halford first comes to our attention with a removal order from Blockley 27 Jan 1818, singlewoman pregnant. This indicates that Campden was her parish of settlement; I can only find a Mary Ann Halford born in Campden but at around the right time, 1796. Then 13 Sept 1824 a Bastardy Bond is granted because she gave birth to ‘a female bastard child and William Ivens of Campden the father.’ⁱ Then she starts to apply for relief and notably in 11.7.1826 she applies ‘for Mary Rouse’s lodging’ – she must have been housing her – but on the same day Mary Rouse applies for rent – I think the Vestrymen smelled a ‘con’ here for this was not allowed!

On 26 Jan 1827 Sarah Halford marries John Rouse and continues to care for his mother who dies in August that year. From then on she makes fairly regular requests for help, including 17 Feb 1829 for ‘little money to help her husband in his calling’ – sadly not explained. So the Vestrymen were not inclined to help John Rouse in his calling (why didn’t he apply himself). Then the Rouses disappear but in May 1831 John Rouse sent a letter from Birmingham asking for a loan of £3 which was allowed. Still chargeable to the parish.

Again all the indications are that they were on a regular allowance and these were extras. And from other examples I do wonder whether people applied for clothing and sheets, only to sell them on for a few pence.

2 April 1822 **Samuel Tracy’s daughter** to have an allowance of 9d a week for looking after her father. What we call today ‘Carers Allowance’.

There were also women who were paid to act as midwives and to ‘lay out’ the bodies of those who died. So it was mainly the women who made a little extra for this community care.

In April 1822 *John Bacon - to have the earnings of his Daughter made up - 1/6 - in case she does not earn it* – what was she doing? Was she in the silk mill?

This was allowed but the Vestry did not seem so keen to help people to work although able-bodied men who applied for labour were referred to the Overseers to the Poor who would set them to public work on the roads etc. Otherwise they were put into the workhouse.

A document in Gloucestershire Archives shows that the poor were not entirely at the mercy of the Vestrymen: they were able to make complaints before the magistrates who presided over the Petty Sessions at Bourton-on-the-Hill.

19 July 1813 Whereas **Jonathon Pleadon** of the parish of Chipping Campden in the said county Taylor hath made oath before we three of His Majesties Justices of the Peace for the said county that he the said Jonathon Pleadon was unable to provide for himself and Family and that he the said Jonathon Pleadon did on 13 July apply for relief to David Holland, one of the Overseers of the poor of the said parish of Chipping Campden and was by him refused to be sufficiently relieved and whereas the said David Holland hath appeared before us this day and both refuse to give such relief to the said Jonathon Pleadon for the support of himself and Family as we judge - sufficient for their support we do therefore order you the said overseer to pay unto the said Jonathon Pleadon the sum of eight shillings weekly and every week for and towards the support of himself and Family until such time as they shall be otherwise ordered according to Law to forbear the said allowance. Given under our hands and seals 19 day of July 1813

J R Hall, Wm Boughton, C? White

Explanation on the reverse

It appearing to the magistrates within mentioned that the within mentioned Jonathon Pleadon can better support himself by working at his trade as a Taylor than going into the workhouse at Campden is the cause of their ordering him the relief of eight shillings a week as mentioned in this order.¹

So the magistrates were here supporting a man to carry on his trade in the community rather than be put into the workhouse. Rather neatly there is a receipt in the Gainsborough estate papers from Jonathan Pleadon for the year 1820, for making the gowns for the Almshouses residents, £1. 4s. so he must have prospered.

The magistrates heard another appeal in 1827, this time from the Vestry. At the Petty Sessions at Bourton-on-the-Hill.

An Order made against **Thomas Dunn**, carpenter, 'being a person of sufficient ability to maintain and provide for his said father', William Dunn, who is 'chargeable to the parish of Chipping Campden' to pay weekly the sum of one shilling and threepence, as long as he is chargeable to the parish.² There is no record of Thomas's marriage, but he is likely to have been a single man at this time and could presumably have afforded to help his father out but chose not to.

By 1841 Thomas Dunn was the landlord of the Lygon Arms and a well-known man in the town. He and his wife Sophia had no children. He may not have been maintaining his father at this time as William Dunn was possibly living at 'Old Stratford', his place of residence given when he was brought back to be buried at St. James in 1842.

¹ Glos Archives P81 OV7

² Glos Archives no ref no.

The sad thing is that we have these stray documents with seldom any follow-up story.

James Dunn, cousin of Thomas Dunn was a bit of a drain on the parish and possibly an embarrassment to him. In 1828 'It is agreed for the parish to pay 14d. a week to William Holmes for a house in Watery Lane for the use of James Dunn and his family.ⁱⁱ They continued to apply for poor relief and in 1830 his wife Susannah was paid 10s for waiting on Mary Wilson – another example of being paid to provide help in the community.

24 May 1831 It is ordered that if James Dunn is found at any time disorderly he is to be put into confinement by the Overseers.

In the 1841 census Susannah was living alone in Broad Entry, Victoria Street, James having moved out – and we find that when he was buried at St. James's Church in 1842 he was living at Hook Norton – perhaps he moved to be near the brewery!

Stephen Blakeman was born in 1791 and in 1815, age 24, he joined the 63rd Regiment of Foot, probably just time to be sent to Guadaloupe where the regiment stayed until 1819. In 1820 he left the army, possibly to avoid going to Ireland with the regiment, and returned at some point to Campden.

In 1829 he was charged with leaving his infant child chargeable to the parish and was sentenced to three months hard labour in Northleach House of Correction.ⁱⁱⁱ Later in the year he applied to have and make over his pension (army) to this parish that he may receive it weekly. Four months later he complained to the Vestry that he was being charged too much for the maintenance of his child and just at this time he and **Job Sermon** committed the crimes (Blakeman stole a lamb and Sermon a lamb and two chickens) that resulted in them being initially sentenced to death but then transported to Van Diemens Land, now Tasmania. Ironically at this time the 63rd Regiment was the escort on the convict ships to Australia and Blakeman may have known some of the soldiers.

Were these crimes of desperation, both had applied to the parish for work, or was the younger Sermon influenced by the hardened Blakeman? Sermon had certainly been found guilty with two others, in 1828, of assault on James Dunn the elder, and was sentenced to 20s fine + 10s costs or two months in Northleach House of Correction.

Campden Workhouse

All these people were receiving poor relief, but the vestry could decide to put them into the workhouse. This was the Campden workhouse, set up in 1724.

The 1723 Knatchbull Act allowed churchwardens to hire a house 'for the maintenance and settling to work of the poor'. Any poor people refusing to be housed there would be denied relief.

This section of the 1722 map of the Countess of Gainsborough's Estates shows a building in a lane that is now Sheep Street. Although it is a sketch map it appears from later evidence that this is the location of the building that was rented by the Churchwardens.

The map drawn in 1818 shows the workhouse on land apparently now belonging to the Churchwardens. The sketch map shows the distinctive shape of the building with wings, perhaps for men and women although it was mainly in the later Union workhouses that the iniquitous dividing up of families was documented. Workhouse Close was probably farmed by the inmates – there are records of calves' skins and cow hide being sold to provide income. There would probably have been vegetable gardens to provide some food.

There are also records of flax, thread and ashes being sold to the workhouse in the early 1800's – these would have been used to weave rough cloth and bleach it, using lye solution made from the wood ash, and then possibly they would have made their own clothes. The inmates would have been let out to work on local farms but the Vestry Minutes give few details that tell us what life was like there, though we know that there were prayers every day and two sermons on Sunday. I wonder if the sermons were given in the workhouse or did the inmates walk through the town to church – were they frogmarched there – at least the practice of badging them with the letters CP (Campden Parish) was long discontinued.

The workhouse closed in 1837 and the building on Workhouse Bank was demolished. The stone was used to build Gainsborough Terrace for the Earl's workmen.

Men in power

What was the attitude of the men in power? The Vestry had jurisdiction over the three settlements of Campden, Broad Campden and Westington, and appointed separate officers to act as Overseers, collecting the rates and disbursing poor relief.

John Hickman represented, as agent, the town's most significant landowning family, the Gainsboroughs, who resided in Rutland. Hickman therefore had good knowledge of the many people dependent for work on the local estate. His sister Mary was married to another Vestryman, Stephen Hancock, an indication of family links between the men in power. Stephen Hancock had inherited money through his uncle's will and from his father. He was a significant landowner and farmer who lived on the edge of town and had land in other parishes.

William Holmes was another Vestryman with family connections. His two sisters were married to Richard Keen and John Keyte, both Vestrymen. Holmes was, according to Rushen, known as "Squire Holmes of Westington", which strictly speaking he was not, but is evidence of his standing in the community.^{iv} He was also a long term Bailiff of the Corporation.

Richard Hulls came from a well-known family, his grandfather being Jonathan Hulls who was credited as the 'Inventor of Steam Navigation'.^v Richard Hulls' Will states that he wishes to be buried in the walled family grave and would object to a large funeral, only the clergyman, family and friends to be present. This seems very modest and perhaps in keeping with the fact that he bequeathed £200 to be invested for the provision of 3d loaves to be given to the industrious poor. He then possibly spoils the effect by instructing that his executors '*cause a board to be affixed in Chipping Campden Church to record the particulars of the said charitable*

bequest'; but perhaps this is not self-promotion but designed to ensure that the poor know their rights. His Will also gives details of the gallery and pews in the church for family use, signifying a prominent church-goer and probably a man who took a paternalistic role in the Vestry.^{vi} His tomb in the parish church reads *'For 47 years he pursued in this town and neighbourhood with great success, and with an unusual reputation the business of his calling, and died at length carrying with him the esteem of all who knew him.'*

Another influential Vestryman was James Turney, who was not a local man but eventually owned four good properties in the High Street. He was a maltster, not perhaps the most elevated position, but the inscription on his tomb states *'In memory of James Turney, who resided in this Parish for 32 years, during fourteen of which he held the office of Parish Churchwarden, in which, as in all the relations of life, he was highly esteemed for his Upright and conscientious Conduct'*.

The same could not be said for one of the other Vestrymen: the aforementioned Richard Keen, farmer, appeared on the Vestry list in 1826 but appears to have resigned when a bastardy bond was granted on behalf of Ann Rymill on 16 April 1827.^{vii}

The Vestrymen were not only in authority over the administration of poor relief and admittance to the workhouse, they also had an impact on older people in other ways: two old Campden charities provided coats for 'poor decayed men', handed out once a year by the Vestry, but according to the Charity Commissioners this practice had fallen into abeyance by 1835.^{viii} Four other charities provided bread, two of which specified that the bread was handed out after church, ensuring that only the godly derived benefit. These charitable bequests were another part of the 'makeshift economy' but bread every few months was hardly likely to be much of a contribution.

Emigration

Emigration was seen nationally as a way of removing the charge to the parishes and in October 1834 the Vestry agreed to support seven families to travel to Canada and Jamaica. Geoffrey Powell, John Sharpe and his wife Temperance, for example, had five children and had been regular poor relief applicants before they applied for help to emigrate. It was quite a journey from Campden to Liverpool, as a start – by carrier, then three days on a canal boat. In charge of the party was Mr Freeman, one of Campden's eight Overseers to the Poor. His job was to protect them until they got to the boat and make sure that they actually went. He seems to have been quite sympathetic – paying for 'Beer given occasionally to the emigrants' and giving the Sharpe's 15s. cash. They needed money for food to survive the awful voyage, the crowded conditions causing illness and death – putrefying bodies remaining where they had died. A levy was imposed in 1832 by the Canadian authorities to help pay for the care of the sick people when they arrived in port, and the hospital money of £1.11s 6d was laid out by the Parish for the Sharp family.

One fifth of national expenditure in 1830 was attributed to the poor rate and this was one of the reasons for the setting up of the Royal Commission on the Poor, its Report and the subsequent Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. Other factors affecting the relief of the poor included a rapidly rising population throughout the country, changes to agricultural employment and decreases in real wages. The main argument in the Report related to the payment of outdoor relief to able-bodied men, although some mention was made of the aged and infirm. The infamous 'Less eligibility' rule was that relief was only to be provided in the workhouse, with destitution the determinant for that relief. The treatment of different categories of paupers, the role of the workhouse, and the balance of in- and out-relief varied considerably between places.^{ix}

Shipston Workhouse

From the 1834 Act parishes were grouped together into Unions, under elected Boards of Guardians, but each parish continued to be financially responsible for its own poor. Able-bodied paupers could receive relief only if they moved into a workhouse. The workhouses were dreaded by the poor; they were often dirty and disease-ridden and no attempt was made to separate the sick, the senile or the mad from the rest of the inhabitants. The very low rates of relief made it almost impossible for people, once reduced to poverty, to escape from it again. However, some outcry a few years later did cause an easing of the rules and out-relief continued to be given, to keep families in the community.

The Shipston Union was formed in 1836 and provided for 34 parishes. Some larger parishes were allocated two places, making a total of 40 on the Board of Guardians. In 1866 Campden was represented by William Rimell and William Stanley, but they were very poor attenders at the weekly meetings and Campden's interests were not necessarily represented. There were salaried Receiving Officers who did the work, including the 'Inspector of Nuisances', who had responsibility for maintaining public health.

There were petitions from Moreton, Campden and Shipston for the new workhouse, but Lord Redesdale, Chairman of the Board of Guardians and owner of Batsford House, may not have wanted the workhouse in his 'backyard'. Shipston workhouse was opened in 1837, with a maximum capacity of 306 inmates, but was later reduced to 230. Between 1857 and 1899 the number of inmates varied from 88 to 156, averaging 118.

There is no information available at the moment to give us details about Campden people in the workhouse, but the censuses give a person's birthplace. In 1851 only seven people born in Campden were in the workhouse, four of these being over 60 years old. This figure rose to 16 in 1881, possibly as a result of the agricultural depression on the 1870's. It appears that outdoor relief was still seen as preferable for maintaining older people in the community, particularly if they had kinship support.

The Minutes of the Board (kept in Warwick Record Office) are mainly decisions about regular reports and accounts, but there are some gems in what might be called 'Any other business' with a few about Campden people. In January 1867 The Board applied to the Poor Law Board in London asking their sanction to the allowance of out relief to James Griffin and family on account of his having to support 13 persons on 15s a week. The reply referred to James Griffin being able-bodied and stated that the Receiving Officer 'to enquire whether parents or either of their children be sent to the workhouse.'

29 April 1871 Order for removal of Ann Parker and five children who is stated to be a deserted wife and acquired a settlement by marriage at Coughton to Thomas Parker who was an illegitimate child born at Chipping Campden. Enquire into grounds of settlement.

They must have accepted her, because in August 1871

A letter from Mr J H Dawe of Cadbury, Massachusetts, a contractor, stating that a man named Thomas Parker is working for him and he will pay half the fare for his wife and children to join him if the Board will pay the other half. Letter sent to ask for the cost.

So as the nineteenth century drew to a close, we know that Campden was striving to come to terms with a changed situation – fewer jobs in agriculture, but already looking to a future that would make the most of improved transport and mobility to introduce a variety of shops and attractions for visitors. The issues remained for poor families - still the threat of the workhouse, though I believe that the much publicised harshness of workhouses was not so prevalent in rural areas. It seems likely that the poorer families were not isolated in the community, and there was a degree of sympathy.

The Workhouse Master's Report Book 1897-8

The ladies of the town visited regularly and brought gifts throughout the year of tea, sugar, sweets, parcels of papers.

On the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 the Master wrote:

I beg to report that the aged inmates and children were invited to tea and sports on Jubilee Day, they enjoyed the treat very much, and I am pleased to say the old people behaved themselves very well indeed.

The inmates had the extra fare allowed for the Jubilee yesterday (Friday) they wish to thank the Board for the same.^x

Mutton or not?

28 July 1866 "Ordered that a letter be written to Dr Yelf drawing his attention to the number of cases in which paupers are allowed mutton under his orders, suggesting that great care should be used only to give such orders in cases of absolute necessity."

11 Aug 1866 “Ordered that a letter be sent to Mr Bradshaw requesting an explanation of his having ordered mutton and gin for paupers whom he had not visited during the week.”

Mr Bradshaw replied explaining that the reasons for his not having visited certain patients to whom extras were allowed was in consequence of his having been partially disabled by a fall from a horse. He applied for ten days leave of absence which was granted.

September 1866 Mr Smith - The Poor Law Commissioners do not require that paupers such as those to whom he had allowed mutton without having visited them should receive the visits of the Medical Officers as frequently as others less chronic and that he had therefore used his own judgement where he was directed to do by the Commissioners.

The Board require weekly visits to every patient for whom he orders extras.

The end of the Workhouse

Gradually in 1900's moved to being the reception Centres for wayfarers/vagrants and then an old people's home, though the stigma remained, according to local memories. 1908 nationally administered schemes for old age pensions were introduced and local authorities provided medical and educational services. Workhouses were finally abolished under National Assistance Act of 1947 which transferred responsibility from local authorities to National Assistance Board.

So what has changed? – Human nature certainly hasn't, and we could debate whether there has been any shift in power. The major change in the administration of the poor law was the gradual move from local vestries to the Unions, to the county and district councils and then in 1947 to the National Assistance Board with an increasing bureaucracy that limits the scope for an economy of makeshifts. How will historians two hundred years hence view the support for the poor of today?

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- i P81 OV5/87
 - ii P81 VE 2/2 (5451)
 - iii 48/B/23

 - iv Rushen p. 143
 - v Rushen p.p. 73-80
 - vi Richard Hulls Will:11 Apr 1842 National Archives
 - vii Overseers of the Poor P81 OV5 Gloucestershire Archives
 - viii Report of the Commissioners concerning the Education of the Poor, Gloucester 1835 p. 468 (Gloucestershire Archives)
 - ix Seal, C. *Workhouse populations in the Cheltenham and Belper Unions: A Study based on the census enumerators' books, 1851 – 191.*(Family and Community History Vol 13/2. Nov 2010. p.83
 - x Shipston Union Workhouse Master's Report Book 1897-98 CR51 1084. Warwick Record Office