

Highworth Workhouse Snippets

C 29 Highworth Wiltshire Workhouse and Additional Overseer Act 1789: For providing a workhouse for the use of the parish of Highworth, in the county of Wilts; and for appointing an additional overseer for the better government of the poor of the said parish.

Acts of Parliament of Great Britain 1780-1800, Section 1780-1789

William Barnes of London received correspondence regarding his parents.

Highworth Workhouse Records 1836 (contact me for details)

The effect of adhering to the rule of refusing out-relief so long as accommodation in the workhouse could be afforded, is, however, so strikingly shown in the Highworth and Swindon unions, in Wiltshire, that it deserves particular mention. "Towards the end of November, the guardians of the Highworth and Swindon unions, who had scarcely commenced acting upon the order for withholding out-door relief from able-bodied males, received, in one day, applications for relief, in aid of wages, from 19 able-bodied labourers, who, with their wives and families numbered about ninety-five persons. The guardians had the firmness and judgment not to relax in their determination. All were offered the house. Rather, however, than incur the heavy expense of their maintenance there, the farmers of the parish to which they belonged (for nearly all belonged to one place, where an effort was making to reduce the already low rate of wages) in a few hours agreed to increase their wages, and only four or five families ultimately came into the house." *The Farmer's Magazine, Vol 7 Pg 556, Nov 1837*

A FRONT FOR A WORKHOUSE

The Guardians of the Highworth and Swindon Union, Wiltshire, have advertised for tenders for the erection of a new Workhouse. There is much wit in this announcement; for the word Tender, in connexion with the word Workhouse is an apt association of incongruous ideas. Anybody who can build a Gaol can also build a Workhouse; but *Punch*, not having devoted his attention to Prison-Architecture, is afraid that he could hardly plan one that would be sufficiently uncomfortable. As far, however, as a facade goes, of a fanciful and ornamental character, he has a few hints, available in the erection of any such edifice, which are quite at the advertisers' service.

Let the facade be of the plainest Doric pillars supporting an entablature. Instead of ox-skulls, let the frieze be decorated with sheep-skulls – to express the richest order of broth to be expected within. Above these let there be certain sculptures, emblematical of the nature and internal economy – which is very strict – of the building. For conspicuousness' sake, these might be carved in high relief; notwithstanding the objection that the relief given to the inmates is the reverse of high. As to subjects, those which present themselves most strongly to the mind of *Punch*, are – Discipline as a Beadle, allowancing Poverty with gruel; Mercy shaving a pauper's head and Political Economy in the form of the Home Secretary, separating man and wife.

Punch Sat 22nd Mar 1845

LETTER FROM THE HIGHWORTH AND SWINDON BOARD OF GUARDIANS TO THE POOR LAW COMMISSIONERS
Highworth and Swindon Union

Gentlemen,

Swindon, 16 January 1846.

On the other side is a copy of a resolution of this Board of Guardians. I am directed to request your advice and assistance in the matter. I remain, &c.(signed) **A. S. Crowdy**.

Board Room, Highworth, 16 January 1846. The committee for inspecting the house reported that the able-bodied men were become very disorderly for want of employment.

"Resolved,—That this Board much regrets the order of the Poor Law Commissioners, prohibiting bone-crushing in the workhouse, because there is no other work to be found for able-bodied paupers in this district, or which would not occasion loss to the union; that there would be no sale for gypsum in this district; that in the open air the employment of bone-crushing was never found to be unwholesome, but it operated as a salutary check upon lazy paupers, who wished to live in the house through the winter, and would not try to get work ; that now that check is removed, the consequences, in the number of young able-bodied men already in the house, and the still greater number who openly state their intention of making it their winter abode, threaten to be very serious. This Board therefore earnestly recommend that the order of the Commissioners should be rescinded."

House of Commons Papers Vol 36 Pg 44-45

At the Meeting of the Board of Guardians of the Highworth and Swindon Union held yesterday, the following tenders were accepted: namely – Mr **Edward Smith** for bread at 1s the 8lb loaf and flour at 38s per sack for District No 1; Mr **John Tarrant** for bread at 11 1/2d the 8lb loaf for District No 2; Mr **William Poole** for beef without bone at 6 1/2d and mutton at 6 1/2d per lb for District No 1 and Mr **C L Tytherleigh** for grocery for the Workhouse (all for three months); and Mr John Lamb for clothing Mr **G Hollick** for shoes and Mr **Edward Prince** for shaving and hair cutting at 1d per head (all for six months from the 28th instant).

Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette Thurs 12 Mar 1846

HIGHWORTH AND SWINDON UNION – SCHOOLMISTRESS WANTED

The Guardians of this Union will at their Meeting to be held at the Workhouse at Highworth on Wednesday the 13th day of May instant proceed to the election of a Schoolmistress for the Workhouse at Highworth the enter upon the office on the 20th day of May instant. Person wishing to offer themselves for the situation must send written applications with testimonials as to character and qualifications to the office of the undersigned on or before the 12th day of May instant and must attend at the Workhouse on the said 13th day of May instant. The salary will be £16 per annum with board and lodging in the house.

Signed by order of the Board

Alfred Southby Crowdy

Clerk of the Union Swindon

2nd May 1846

Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette Thurs 7th May 1846

HIGHWORTH AND SWINDON UNION

At the meeting of the Board of Guardians of this union on Friday last, the following tenders were accepted: namely Mr **W E Litten** for the supply of bread at 1s the 8lb loaf and flour at 36s per sack for District No 1 and the Workhouse. Mr **J R Bedford** for bread at 11 1/2d the 8lb loaf for District No 2. Mr **William Poole** for beef without bone and mutton at 7 1/2d per lb for District No 1 and the Workhouse. Mr **C L Tytherleigh** for grocery. Mr **Samuel Jones** for coal at 22s per ton and Mr **William Tame** for shaving and hair-cutting at 3/4d per head – all for three months and Mr **George Tarrant** for shoes for six months from the 25th instant.

Devizes and Swindon Gazette Thurs 23 Sep 1847

There were 159 inmates in the workhouse on 8th April 1861. In the year of 1861, there were 15 deaths, 8 males and 7 females. *Annual Report GRO*

Mrs **Archer** of Kingsdowne House, Stratton St Margaret, Swindon favoured the boarding out of 'orphan pauper girls'. At the time of the report to the Poor Law Board dated 20th Dec 1865, there were

nine female orphans receiving out-door relief with the allowance of 2s 6d a week for board and lodging and 10s 6d per quarter for clothing,

"A Letter to the Ex-Officio Guardians and the Elected Guardians of the Poor" 1866 by Hannah Archer
Extract

...There is however a class of children who by law are under the especial care of the Guardians of the Poor – I mean the young orphan paupers who have lost both father and mother and who have neither grandfathers nor grandmothers in a position to maintain them. Until such children arrive at the age of sixteen, they are subject to the control of the Board of Guardians, who can relieve them either in the workhouse or out of the workhouse and feed and clothe and educate and employ them as they think fit.

...But I wish now especially to speak of the little Orphan Pauper Girl. When her last parent has been carried to the grave and the furniture or any little remaining property has been disposed of – the table, the two or three chairs, the clock, grasped perhaps by a hungry relative, who pleads that she is "out of pocket" by what she has done for the child since the parent's death, or during the last illness of the parent – the child is in most cases brought before the Board of Guardians, either for admittance into the Workhouse, or for the allowance of out-door relief under some friendly cottager's roof.

...A young Orphan girl, belonging to the parish in which I live, who had been brought up in the Workhouse since her infancy and who when she had arrived at about fourteen years of age was sent to respectable shopkeeper in a neighbouring town and hired as a servant, upon being congratulated on her success, made answer "I am sure I don't know whether I was hired, for I didn't see a show there." The "shows" that are exhibited at country hiring fairs, were the things which she had been taught by her migratory school-fellows to conclude must be a part of her being hired as a servant.

...A short time ago I visited the Workhouse of the district in which I live and found upon inquiry that there were seven women then in the house of bad character, to whom belonged fifteen children; and that these seven women and fifteen children were constantly leaving the Workhouse and returning to it after a short absence. Now in the girls' school at this Workhouse there are about thirty-five children, among whom there are two or three Orphans. What chance then can these young friendless residents have of a proper moral training, when fifteen of their companions have depraved mothers for their instructors and whose acquaintances out the Workhouse are most likely dissolute outcasts. Will not such children impart to the workhouse Orphans just that kind of knowledge from which every thoughtful person would wish to guard a child? And shall such children be almost the sole companions of the little Orphan Girl during the impressionable years of her childhood! No bright-eyed merry-hearted children, well brought up, are likely to come to the Orphan's side, showing her a different phase of life. Many around her would be those who have been deserted by their parents. Can such be joyous companions?

...Their little hearts have in many instances been subdued to an unnatural calmness by the cold-hearted desertion of their lawful protectors. I have seen the tear gathering in the eyelid of the deserted child, when I have kindly questioned her as to what brought her to the Workhouse, but she has restrained it from falling upon her cheek and returned it, as was I suppose her wont, to the fountain within. What would tears avail the child who sums up her little history in the short reply "Mother left me in the road and she hav'nt never been heard of since and someone brought me here."

The Workhouse then with all its saddening and worse than saddening influences, cannot be a proper place wherein to educate our little Orphan pauper girls. Surely at the cottager's fire-side and in the village school, with the light-hearted companions that she may meet with, if brought up out of the Workhouse, the Orphan's mind would receive better impressions and the child would be more likely to become a useful member of society.

Let me therefore, my Lords and Gentlemen, earnestly entreat you as Guardians whose wards these Orphan pauper children assuredly are, to exert your utmost power that in every possible case, out-door relief shall be given them. The Ladies of England would no doubt do their part and assist the Relieving officers in the supervision of the children, as well as supplementing with alms, if necessary, the usual out-door relief. If all parties would thus work together, no orphan children need remain in our Workhouses, but each one of them may be enabled to grow up with the same advantages as other children of the labouring classes and many a little face now stolid with the look of indifference, would be gilded with smiles.

Believe me, my Lords and Gentlemen,
Your's obediently,
Hannah Archer

Mr **Archer**, chairman of the Highworth and Swindon Board of Guardians, reports very favourably of its success in his district, where it has been in operation seven or eight years. The Highworth and Swindon Guardians board out as many children as they possibly can, and are satisfied with the system, which they find cheaper as well as better than keeping them in the workhouse.

"Little Pauper Boarders" Charles Dickens 28th Aug 1869

The person who first publicized effectively the advantages of the boarding out system however, was Mrs **Hannah Archer** of the Union of Swindon and Highworth. In 1861, she obtained the permission of the guardians of her union to place orphan girls with foster parents. The guardians paid the foster parents an allowance equivalent to the cost of maintaining a child in the workhouse while Mrs **Archer** supplemented this with a small extra sum of voluntary contributions. The girls were aged from 2 to 11 years and went direct to the foster parents from their own homes on being orphaned. She followed this with a pamphlet in which she appealed to the 'Gentlewomen of the Church of England' to form themselves into a society in each union for finding foster homes and for placing and supervising orphan girls. She stressed that it was not the food or clothing or schooling that was inadequate in the workhouse but rather that children's "minds are contracted and their affections stifled to such a degree that they are unfitted for being placed out' in respectable employment. It was the system that was to blame for the state of affairs and not the staff who ran the workhouses: The workhouse schoolmistress cannot do a mother's part to the many little girls of all ages from 3 to 14 placed under her charge. She can be gentle with them as a shepherd with a flock of lambs; but they are to her as a mass of human life and one rule must answer for all."

"Foster Care, Theory and Practice" Victor George Vol 128 1970