

OVERSEERS BOOK, 1831-1845, Weston on the Green

by

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Introduction

1. The Elizabethan poor law act² ordered the churchwardens and four, three or two substantial householders to be nominated each year as overseers of the poor, with the duty of maintaining and setting the poor to work, the funds being raised by taxation of "*every inhabitant, parson, vicar and other and every occupier of lands, houses, tithes .. coal mines or saleable underwood*". The Relief of the Poor Act 1782 (22 Geo.3 c.83), also known as Gilbert's Act,[1] aimed to organise poor relief on a county basis, counties being organised into parishes which could set up workhouses between them. The sick, elderly and infirm were cared for in poorhouses whereas

¹ Final version 28 March 2015, kindly proof-read by Gwyneth Learner.

² 43 Eliz.c.(1601)

the able-bodied poor were provided with outdoor poor relief in their own homes or were found work in the “roundsman” system.

2. The expenditure by the Weston on the Green Overseers of the Poor covers in theory the 14 years of the title on the Overseer’s Book but the details virtually cease after only five years (in 1836 when the Bicester Union Workhouse and its Guardians took over the management of the poor). Nevertheless these first five years occupy 36 pages in the book purchased for the purpose on October 1st 1831 (at a cost of 7s.). For only two years did the overseers record their total expenditure £259.2s.9d. (1832) and £340.12.5d. (1833) whilst the total income “*rcd. by 4 taxes amounted to £301.17s. and £310.17s.*”. In 1834 a 3s. rate is mentioned and in 1836 the accounts mention “*Recd. by 1st. rate “75.9s.3d.”*”, so presumably a rate was levied every quarter.
3. The accounts illustrate the operation of the so-called Speenhamland System³ of poor relief for a short period before and just after the building of the Bicester Union Workhouse . This system used a scale of relief based upon the size of the family and the price of bread. By 1820, the high price of bread following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and the introduction of the Corn Laws, had pushed the poor rates to very high levels.

The Overseers

4. The names are given of the Overseers appointed in 1832, 1834 and in 1835 when an Assistant Overseer was also appointed for “*1 yr from Lady Day*”⁴. The Overseers were all farmers at the 1841 census and their acreages were recorded at the 1848 Tithe. William Spittle (d.o.b. 1793, obit. 1851) who

³ Public houses across the country exhibited tables showing the provisions of the “Speenhamland Act of Parliament”, although it was never on the statute book.

⁴ Feast of the Annunciation, 25 March being one of the quarter days when payments are due and tenancies start and end.

had no immediate family, lived with Mary Dew a female servant in 1841 and farmed 308 acres; Richard Wheeler (1756-1846) farmed 219 acres taken over by Susan his daughter on his death; William Howse (1776-1853) farmed via his sons David on 162 and Henry on 171 acres; John Spittle (1786-1848) farmed the 42 acres still in the name of his father Thomas (1742-1807) at the 1848 Tithe and John Jakeman (d.o.b 1809, obit ?) farmed 555 acres.

Outdoor relief in kind.

5. Although the accounts show page after page of cash payments to many different villagers, there were benefits in kind; they were given to four men. Tom Tuffery (d.o.b. 1772; obit. 1835) was given clothing (17s.) and "*shirts and making them*" (4s. 5d. and 1s.6d) in 1831, two pairs of stockings (2s.) and a "*smockfrock*" (6s.6d) in 1833 and two shirts (4s.) in 1835. Richard Tuffery (dob. 1766?1771?; obit ?) also received two pairs of stockings (2s.:8d). In 1831 the Overseers gave E.Spittle (1773-1840) "*shirts and sheets and making*" (4s. 5d. and 1s.6d) and then recorded "*100 of coal for Rd. Jefferson*" (1774-1832) (1s. 4d.) . The next year they "*Pd for clothing for John Biggs(not traced)*⁵ ... 5s.". One questions why these four were singled out for such special treatment, especially when they were old and shortly to die and be buried in the village.

Outdoor relief in cash

6. Payment in cash to individual families varied according to their size; a single man (3s); a single woman, (2s); a man and wife 4s.6d; with one child 6s. and, for every extra child, an extra 1s.6d. In 1836, because of the time

⁵ A "James" Bigg, dob, 1783, was buried in 1830 i.e two years earlier.

taken to process the requests for relief, the overseers hired a “*room for 13 weeks for relieving officer to pay poor at 1/- per week 13/-*”. The overseers also paid the rents of a small number of villagers “*Tuffery rent to 2 years to Michaelmas, 1833 £3.10s.*”; “*East the rent of 1 year £1.5s*” and in October 1833 10s was paid for Wm Green’s rent.

7. Payment to those villagers, mainly women , who were recorded as having no work in 1831, were much smaller:-

<i>Hannah Boddington no work</i>	4 ½ d
<i>Sarah Porter no work</i>	1 ½ d
<i>Goodeth Coggins, Lucy & Sarah Cox no work</i>	1/1 ½
<i>Elena Ayres no work</i>	1 ½
<i>Elizabeth Boddington no work</i>	3d
<i>Elizabeth East</i>	4d
<i>Susan Clark no work</i>	4 ½ d

8. Enhanced payments were made to sick paupers and payment was also made for their carers. “*Pd Mrs Dumbleton for nursing and keeping Phoebe Tuffery when ill with smallpox £1.15s;Pd John Tuffery for waiting on Phoebe [his daughter] 3 nights instead of a woman to sit up 1/6*”. Similarly, *Ann Falkner for attending her grandmother 8 weeks 8s*”. When J Coggins was recognised as “ill” in 1831, his payments seem to have remained a basic 3s. In 1832 “*William Butler ill*” was given 7s; he was then aged 25, married with one son. He was later an outpatient of the Radcliffe Infirmary. After Martha, his wife, died in 1843, during his continued illness he was given 4s.6d and 9 loaves weekly for his two boys and three daughters. In March 1844 he was “*struck off by Relieving Officer for not having produced a certificate of his illness from the doctor*”. When Joseph Tuffery was in gaol, his wife Dinah/Deborah, then paying 8d. a week for lodging, was granted relief of 1s. and 3 loaves for her two small boys, Joseph , aged 18 months and Charles, just 4 months on 8th March 1844⁶ who was to be

⁶ Richmond, Carol “*Bicester Poor Law Union and Workhouse Records 1834-1851*”, Black sheep Publications, Witney 2006, , p. 46

described as “weak minded”. She had seven more children of whom four died in infancy; two sons, Robert and Alfred, both moved to Birmingham, a rapidly growing industrial town and married there in 1875 and 1876. The detailed expenditure stops in 1836.

Single mothers

9. Mary Green, spinster, was given 4s.6d for three weeks support for her child, Ann, who died in infancy in 1832 when the Overseers paid “ *R Davis for tolling the bell and digging the grave for Greens child...4s.*”. Matilda Pulley⁷, a spinster whose son, Henry Bartlett was born in 1826, received 2s per week for 195 weeks from July 1832. Mary Gregory, a spinster agricultural labourer, was given 28 payments of 1s:6d for her first child, Silas, in 1835; she proceeded to have two more - Sarah in 1838 and Martha in 1841.

10. In 1836 the Overseers collected money every quarter from “*Wm Boteril for bastard child...£1. 19s*” (he lived in Wendlebury) and also in 1837 from “*Wm Clarke of Hampton Poyle (Ladyday to Michaelmas 1837 £1.19s)*”.

These two payments were not necessarily related to the Green and Gregory bastard children. In fact it was the single mother Hannah East who in 1833 received from the overseers two payments each of 6s. for four week in respect of her son, “William James Botterell East”, prior to money coming from the father.

11. The mothers had, by the law of 1732-3 to declare themselves pregnant and had to name the father, so the overseers would have known the identity of the fathers of the children in question. They would then have had to choose between arranging a “*knobstick*” marriage” so the father became responsible for his offspring and, alternatively, forcing him to

⁷ She was the only single mother among the six daughters of Thomas Pulley, yeoman ; he left his property to his wife on condition that “*she continues to be my widow*”; his plaque is in the north wall of the church tower.

pay for the child's upkeep under an order from local justices or the quarter sessions.

12. The first reference to illegitimate children in the parish register is in 1730 when Mary Barrett was "*born in a state of ante-nuptial fornication*" between Robert Barrett and Mary Allum. Until 1820 no more than one or two illegitimate children every decade were registered ("*base born daughter*", "*spurious daughter*", "*bastard son*") to spinsters, single women or widows. Then in the 1820s, six bastard children were baptised, another ten in the 1830s, 15 in the 1840s (when they accounted for over 10% of all baptisms) and 12 in the 1850s. This reflects the influence of a new, resident vicar, the Rev.A.H.Matthews, who arrived and enlarged the vicarage in 1823.
13. The overseers were involved in considerable expenses in pursuing the putative fathers. In 1833 they recorded a "*journey to Bicester resp Lucretia Freeman...2s. 6d.; expenses at the Sessions incl. L.Freeman board & lodging ... £1.11s*"; payment for an order of "filiation" 8s. 6d; then payment to the "*overseer at Middleton on acct of L.Freeman £3.18s.6d*". The final "*warent to commitment*" cost 8s.6d. They were successful in getting 19s.3d from the "*united parishes of Oxford for maintenance of Rebbecca Wiggins*" whose illegitimate son, Henry, was born in 1839.

Other legal expenses

14. Under the Settlement Act, overseers were able to send persons back to their parish of settlement. In 1836, they paid 17s.6d. for the "*order of removal of Sml Reads family (suspended from the parish of St,Ebbs)*". In 1845 they "*Pd justices clerks bill for law ex.p in the procescution of Wm Brain and Jos Tuffery for leaving their families chargeable £1 3s.*" On a

journey in 1832 to Oxford the overseers paid £1 to lawyers and then £14.11s.7d. to settle the bill for the trial of Thomas Butler⁸. Although Butler had settlement papers for the village of Claydon, the Bicester Union papers for 25 March 1846 recorded him living at Weston and receiving relief at 7s:4 $\frac{1}{2}$ d per week as an ill pauper for three weeks (£1.2s.1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d) until he recovered.

Illness and funeral expenses

15. Francis Davis was paid 5s. 6d for digging the graves of Wm Fennemore, [Abigail]Green and of Mary Clary (1785-1832), but rather less, 3s. 6d, for the funeral of "*Tuffery's child*" (Emmanuel Tuffery, an infant) and 4s. 2d for "*East's child's funeral*" (John East, aged 5). When Thomas Hanwell died, 3s. was paid for his laying out and 2s.6d for gin and beer at his funeral. The Overseers paid more to "*Hannah Coggins and Mary Ayer for attending to Wm Finnemore and laying him out... 5s*". Richard Tombs, victualler at "The Chequers" PH, was paid 5s for "*gin and beer for Finnemore's funeral*".
16. Charles Tuffrey (dob 1805) was only 27 when he became ill and died in 1832, having been ill for five weeks (cash payments from the Overseers totalled 18. 6d) excluding 3s "*pd. for bed for Charles Tuffery*". He was the third son of Charles Tuffery whose wife Hannah bore him nine children, of whom Hannah died in infancy in 1817.⁹. A woman was paid for "*sitting up and waiting on Charles Tuffery 4 nights 6/-*". The Overseers paid "*Francis Davis for tolling the bell...7/- and digging grave*

⁸ Thomas Butler and Charles Thame were charged at the January 1832 Quarter Sessions with stealing 10s. of fat, the property of their Master, Joseph Whiteaves and were each sentenced to two months in prison.

⁹ The overseers in October 1835 paid the "*Rent of cottage Chas. Tuffery children £3:10s to Michaelmass*"

for Charles Tuffery....5/6” and bought “Gin and beer and bread and cheese for funeral ... 18s. 2d” - It was a big occasion ; Charles was obviously a very popular young man and had over 40 relatives living in the village. His younger sister Rachel Tuffery (d.o.b. 1815) was ill and was paid 4s per week for over 34 weeks (totalling £1.10s.).

17. *“William Butler, an outpatient at the Infirmary with 7 children who had received 4s.6d and 9 loaves weekly, was struck off by the Relieving Officer for not having produced a doctor’s certificate”¹⁰.*

Roundsmen

18. Under the “roundsmen” system, the able-bodied pauper would apply for work to the Overseer who would send him house to house round the parish. A Public House landlord, a carpenter, a haulier, the miller or other village householders might give work for a week, whilst farmers might take on another worker per 100 acres. On average half his wages came from the employer and half from the parish which recovered this expenditure from a rate on the parish. In September 1833, the Overseers recorded payment totalling £14.2s. by the parish to the following six farmers:-

<i>Mr Williams round people</i>	<i>£4 2s 11d</i>
<i>Mr Spittles round people</i>	<i>£1 17s</i>
<i>Mr Saml Howses people</i>	<i>£3 13s 0 ½</i>
<i>Mr David Howses people</i>	<i>3/1</i>
<i>Mr Jakeman people</i>	<i>£3 11s 7d</i>
<i>Mr Wheeler rounds people payments</i>	<i>15/3</i>

19. At the end of the accounts of the Overseers was the following, so-called “*List of regular payments (rounds) Oct 1831 – Aug 1835*”. The list includes

¹⁰ This excerpt is from the Constable’s Book

the names of 80 villagers, mainly men, but also several women (the widows Reeves, Biggs, Clary, Green, Jones, Wise, and Falkner) as well as children, Each name is followed by a number possibly indicating the number of times or days when that individual was given subsidised employment, e.g. “John Jameman, once”; “William Williams, X 2”, and “Robert Thoms x 39” for the men and payments to widows and unmarried mothers for their children¹¹.

John Jakeman once	Widow Biggs x 12	Thos Boddington x 35
John Brain x 11	Ri Butler x 16	John Clarke x 35
William Clarke x 35	Widow Clary x 12	John Claydon x 35
John Coggins x 6	Joseph Coggins x 34	James Coggins x 8
Henry Cox x 35	Francis Davis x 37	Widow Falkner x 37
Thomas Falkner x 34	Widow Green x 37	William Green x 37
Joseph Green x 21	West Green x 30	Thomas Hanwell x 14
John Hathaway x 31	Hinton’s child x 33	Ri Jefferson x 5
Jefferson’s child x 27	Widow Jones x 37	William Jones x 32
Porter’s child x 37	William Read x 37	Uriah Read x 37
Widow Reeves x 37	Alexander Reeves x 34	James Spittle x 2
Robert Thomas x 39	Toms child x 35	Isaac Tuffery x 35
John Tuffery x 16	James Tuffery x 29	James Tuffery x 27
Elizabeth Tuffery x 8	Widow Wise x 33	William Williams x 2
Wharton girl x 7	Timothy Boddington x 6	William Butler x 9
John Green x 10	Thos Coggins x 6	Thos Constable x 18
Thos Waite x 8	Chas Porter x 5	Thos Tuffery x 14
William Ward x 31	Zach Toms x 10	William Brain x 20
Ri Coggins x 17	Green’s child x 4	James East x 14

¹¹ A line has been drawn through the names of known unmarried mothers.

Joseph East x 5	Geor Ayres x 3	Thomas Clarke x 3
Tuffery's child x 29	Stephen Read x 13	Hannah Ward x 6
Elizabeth Jefferson x 2	Bigg's child x 23	Jefferson's widow x 24
Butler's child x 23	Matthew's widow x 23	Hannah East x 2
Saml Howse x 1	Edmund East x 19	East's child x 16
Wiggins widow x 12	Freeman's child x 1	Chas East x 3
Ann Wiggins x 11	Thos East x 9	William Goodson x 3
Ri Brain x 1	Widow East x 2	

20. The roundsman system was described as an *“atrociously bad one but its worst effects came after 1795 when the Speenhamland System was grafted on to it”*¹² as was the case in Weston on the Green. It was demeaning for the labourer himself who had to go round his own village, cap in hand, virtually begging for work. It was unsatisfactory for the employer who came to expect, from these subsidised supplementary labourers, less than a fair day's work from employees who knew he was not paying a full and fair day's wages.

The Bicester Union Workhouse

21. The treatment of the poor was to change dramatically with the formation of the Bicester Poor Law Union on 1st August 1835. Its operation was overseen by an elected Board of Guardians, 40 in number, representing its 38 constituent parishes. Union workhouses were intended to reduce, even eliminate, the heavy charge on the ratepayers of outdoor cash relief. The large Bicester Union work house¹³ opened in October 1836 and could accommodate 350 inmates in separate wings for men, women and children. In return for food and

¹² Tate, *ibid*, pp233 and 234.

¹³ It replaced a small one for 40 inmates dating from the 1770's established in Market End Bicester with forty inmates .

lodging, the able bodied men had to pump water for two hours, break stones for three hours or pick three quarters lb. of oakham¹⁴ (only a half pound for able women inmates). The first inmates were from Bicester. The Weston overseers made a first payment to the Treasurer of the Union in September 1836 of £25.10s., followed by two more of £22 and then in February 1837, they made the much larger payment of £82. They intended to make full use of the new system.

22. In Weston, Joseph Coggins, a 50 year old agricultural labourer with four daughters, was declared able and having no work for 12 days, applied for work or outdoor relief, but was ordered into the workhouse in October 1841. John Reeve, with a wife and one child, also applied for work or relief, but was ordered into the House in December, 1841. The kindly Rev.A.H. Matthews proposed that *“Hannah of Weston to receive 1s. and 1 loaf; this was put to the vote and she is to receive an order for the workhouse”*.. James East with a wife and 6 children was ordered by the Weston overseers *“in consequence of not having a house to reside in”* although he was earning 19s.6d per week. The Board resolved that *“he be discharged from the House when his children who are ill are fit to leave (April 1847)”*¹⁵.

Lunatics

23. Madness was seen principally as a domestic problem for families and parish authorities would send any especially disturbed or violent mad villager away at considerable expense to charitable institutions like the Radcliffe Asylum in Headington¹⁶. The overseers paid 2s., or 4s.

¹⁴ Loose fibre obtained from old rope used for caulking between the planks of wooden ships.

¹⁵ Richmond, Carol *“Bicester Poor Law Union and Workhouse Records 1834-1851”*, Black sheep Publications, Witney 2006, , pp 16, 17, 46, 49 & 50

¹⁶ Opened in 1826, by public subscription and with money donated by John Wye of Northamptonshire. It was renamed the Warneford in 1843 in honour of its greatest benefactor Samuel Wilson Warneford (1763-1855).

later, to have lists prepared of any lunatics in the village and these, together with the jury lists, were taken to Bicester. In 1832 they paid “£18 to asylum on account Richard Tuffery”. In 1835 the overseers sent Richard Tuffery, aged 40, to the Radcliffe asylum, a private charity for the middle classes, against an initial payment of £8.8s., followed in 1836 by two payments of £18.15s.6d. Later that year he was transferred “from Rad.Asy. to Hook Norton¹⁷ by order of the board of guardians”; the move involved expenses of £2:0:6d together with 10s.6d to “Wm.Tilsky Hook Norton entrance fee.” From March 1832 until April 1836, the overseers paid a total of £165.19s. on behalf of Richard Tuffery; this was the largest payment to any individual villager. The status of lunatics was altered by the Lunacy Act 1845 that considered them to be patients who required treatment.

ANNEX I: OVERSEER’S BOOK : Sample page (Page 1 of 36)

“extra” are total of written out across page

“pay” are total of names in columns

1831	oct 1	pd for this book	7/-
		Mrs Ward at Parish meeting	5/6
		Pd with the jury list	6/-
		With lunatic list	4/-
		Exp at Bic taking in the above lists	2/6
		Hannah coggins with Richard Coggins child	2/6
		J Coggins ill	3/-
		Mary Goodson	1/-
		William Boddington	5/-
		J Wiggins wife	3/-
		Edw Spittles washing	1/6
		J Jackmans rounds	£1 15s 9d
Oct 8		Hannah Coggins with Richard Coggins child	3/6
		J Coggins ill	3/-
		Mary Goodson	1/-

¹⁷ A much older, private asylum built in 1725

	William Boddington	5/-
	John Wiggins wife	3/-
	Clothing for Tom Tuffery	17/-
	William Green for rent	10/-
Oct 15	Hannah Coggins with Richard Coggins child	3/6
	J Coggins ill	3/-
	Mary Goodson	1/-
	William Boddington	5/-
	John Wiggins wife	3/-
Oct 22	Hannah coggins with Richard Coggins child	3/6
	J coggins ill	3/-
	Mary Goodson	1/-
	William Boddington	5/-
	John Wiggins wife	3/-
	Sarah Gregory ill 2w	4/-
	D Read ill 3w	3/3
	J Biggs ill	1/6
	Edw Spittles washing 3w	2/3
	Thomas Falkner ill	7/6
Oct 25	pd Tuffery at Parish meeting	17/8
29 Oct	Hannah Coggins with Richard Coggins child	3/6
	J coggins ill	3/-
	Mary Goodson	1/-
	William Boddington	5/-
	Sarah Grarey (?Gregory) ill 1w	2/-
	J Biggs ill	1/6
	Susannah Fawdrey 7w	10/6
	Thomas Coggins	1/-
	Timothy Boddington	1/-
	J Green	1/-
	Thomas Constable	1/-
	William Butler	1/-
	Thomas Wait	1/-