

THE HOUSE THE UNION BUILT

As England recovered from the shock of the 'Swing' riots the Government set up a central body, 'The Poor Law Commission' to examine the plight of the poor and decide how it could best be remedied. They needed to keep the able-bodied unemployed from causing any further trouble but, at the same time, to keep down the Poor Rates that were placing an intolerable burden on some communities. Under the old Poor Law each parish was required to support its own paupers, the relief being organised by the Churchwardens and Overseers of each separate parish who collected the Poor Rate and then helped the poor as they saw fit, either by 'out relief' or by setting up Workhouses.

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 required parishes to join together to administer relief to the poor. The 'Elham Union' of parishes, created in 1835, was the area of modern Shepway: Acrise, Cheriton, Elham, Elmstead, Folkestone, Hawkinge, Lyminge, Lympne, Monks Horton, Newington, Paddlesworth, Postling, Saltwood, Sellinge, Stanford, Stelling, Stowting, Swingfield, although Folkestone and Hythe were originally excluded. Elham Vestry took a vote as to whether Upper Hardres was to be included but they voted against the idea and Upper Hardres joined the 'Bridge Union'. In July 1835 the newly-formed Union accepted the tender of Mr Thomas Finch Cozens of Canterbury, of £3,840 to build a Union Workhouse at Etchinghill. That there should be no discussion with architects as to design, purpose or use is explained by Sir Francis Bond Head's report to the Poor Law commissioners that he was persuading the Guardians of Kent and Sussex to adopt the 'same low, cheap, homely building,' and presumably he also provided the plans. He did not succeed in his attempt for the Bridge Union, for which a Mr J.F.Cozens had obtained a contract in May for £4,376, is not on the same pattern.

The next week, having got the building underway, the Guardians established the 'dietry' for the Workhouse. Again they were directed by central government, through Head, the Assistant Commissioner, who tried, successfully I believe, to persuade all Kent Unions to provide the same diet. It was agreed

'That the following dietry might immediately be established in the Workhouses and Poorhouses of the Elham Unions -

For the able-bodied men and women

Breakfast and Supper

Bread and cheese or butter; 6oz of bread for men, 5oz for women, with 1oz of cheese or ½oz of butter.

Dinner

Two days Suet pudding and vegetables; 1lb of pudding for men, 10oz for women.
One day Meat pudding with vegetables; 1lb of pudding for men, 10oz for women.
Four days Bread and cheese; 7oz of bread, 1oz of cheese.

For old people

The same diet as for the able-bodied with the addition of 1oz of tea with milk for breakfast and supper.

For children

Bread and milk for breakfast and supper with such proportions of the dinner diet for the able-bodied as shall be ordered for their respective ages by the Board of Guardians.

For the sick

Whatever is ordered for them by the medical officer.

The work of the Poor Law continued and was minuted alongside the new building programme. Bills amounting to 25/- were sent to Rbt Hawkins and Willm Cloke, the Overseers for Stelling in July and the Guardians discussed the case of Mark Castle of Stelling, among many others, and decided 'That in this case he do have medical relief but that any further relief, for the present, be deferred'. Castle, one of the labourers in Mr Dodd's barn the day the 'Swing' riot occurred, was buried two months later, on the 18th September 1835, aged 25.

In September a loan from the Exchequer, for building, was arranged. In October Cozens' specification was sent for examination. In December the Poor Law Commissioners approved the proposed 'dietry' but added that children should have gruel for breakfast when milk was unobtainable. This month Cozens had built enough of the House to ask for, and get, £1,000 payment. In January advertisements were placed for a Master for the new Workhouse, who would receive £80 per annum, plus provision and fuel, 'To apply personally February 12 .'. Three men, Saunder, Barnard and Barry were selected 'from the number offering' and the Clerk was instructed to enquire into their character and testimonials. Strangely, the man appointed, Nicholas Chubb, was not among them. He and his wife commenced as Governor and Matron of the Workhouse on 25th March 1836, at a joint salary of £80 p.a.

Now the preparations for furnishing the new workhouse began. Iron bedsteads were bought: 24 single @ 14/3 each, 50 wide @ 20/8 each, 16 two-tier @ 39/6 and 24 turnup at 23/6. They advertised for tenders for bedding.

50 flock beds 6 by 4 feet	in linen ticks	
25	.. 6 by 3	..
60 pairs	10 by 4 blankets	5lb per pair
..	9 by 4 ..	4½lb ..

100 pairs home made sheets 2½yds by 1¾yds
 1,000 yds of yard wide strong scotch sheeting
 60 10 by 4 diaper cotton rugs
 60 9 by 4
 Tenders by 11th March 1836.

They ordered two tons of coal to be carried to the Workhouse.
 In April Mr Hall of Folkestone was asked to supply:

Pudding pans	@ 7/8 doz	12 doz
Porringers	@ 5/- doz	7 ..
Candlesticks	@ 8/6 doz	3½ ..
Tinder boxes	@ 6½d each	½ ..
Tea kettles	@ 2/8 ..	3
Slop Pails	@ 6/6 ..	1 doz
Tin Cannisters	@ 1/9 ..	1
Watercans	@ 3/9 ..	½ doz

Mr Drury of Canterbury supplied:

Iron spoons	@ 1/1 doz	12 doz
Iron hand bowls	@ 1/7 ea	1 doz

His tender for a mangle @ £12.10.0 and 'lanthorns' @ 1/8 ea. was obviously not accepted. Mr Dungey of Ashford provided 4 doz knives and forks and 4 doz knives and forks (smaller), 1 doz dustpans and ½ doz flat irons. As Mr Drury had tendered for knives and forks at 8/- doz, dustpans at 10½d ea. and flat irons at 1/4 ea., presumably Mr Dungey was offering a better bargain. Mr Cozens was paid another £1,500.

Between times the Guardians considered 'the case of John Marsh (of Stelling) deranged in his mind and his wife' and gave them 5/-, but then they decided to send him to the Workhouse after all. Presumably this was the old Workhouse at Elham. They gave Mary Young 13/- 'for her to be able to return to Deptford' and refused to give Isaac Barton anything. They queried whether William Foord was properly of the parish of Stelling (where he lived) or Upper Hardres (as they suspected). They allowed Mary Andrews some clothing and gave 5/- to Henry Smitten.

Mary Young, who had been given 13/- to go to Deptford only in January, then asked for relief there in March. The Board wrote to Deptford that, as they 'will not sanction any relief to be paid there, this Parish may therefore take the legal steps of sending her home.' This question of 'settlement' caused innumerable problems to all Unions. Initially each parish continued to be charged for the expenses of its own paupers, plus a proportion of central expenses. In 1866 the account books charged all paupers from the Union to 'Elham Union' and the expense was divided among the parishes. It was not until the twentieth century that central government began, with old age pensions, sickness benefit and unemployment benefit, to make the question of 'settlement' irrelevant.



Old Poorhouse, Elham

By May the Guardians were running out of money and found they needed to borrow another £2,000 from the Exchequer. They appointed Guardians from each parish. Mr Francis Castle was the Guardian for Stelling. He farmed Court Lodge and was actively involved, with his sons, in trying to prevent machine breaking in Upper Hardres during the Swing riots of 1830. As the most important person in Stelling, he would be expected to undertake his duties for nothing, riding down to 'Each End Hill' for the weekly meetings and inspecting the House as part of a weekly Visiting Committee. Mr John Fuller of Aldington was also appointed in May, as Collector of Poor Rates. He wasn't expected to do it for nothing but was allowed to keep 4d in the £ of all rates collected. Later this had to be increased to 5d to persuade him to stay on. It can't have been an easy or a popular job.

On the 26th May, 1836, ten months after they accepted the tender of Mr Cozens to build the Workhouse, the Guardians decreed that 'The paupers be removed from the old Elham Workhouse to the new Elham Workhouse, at Lyminge, on Tuesday the 7th June. They insured the new building with Norwich Union Fire Office, for £3,000, (£2,000 building, £1,000 furniture and stoves) and advertised for a schoolmaster, schoolmistress and porter.

Then they invited tenders for provisions for the next three months and decided to appoint a Chaplain. The tenders came in swiftly, similar to this example recorded in 1838 -

Tender from Sam Bailey

Good second butter	89/- cwt
Gouda cheese	49/- ..
Yellow soap	52/- ..
Salt	3/1 ..
Candles	6/3 doz lbs
Tea	3/8 lb
Sugar	6½d lb

I think this explains why 1oz of cheese equalled ½oz of butter: it was only half as expensive! Gouda cheese was readily obtainable from the Dutch trade in a county like Kent that produced little cheese itself.

The first few pages of the Admission Registers list the names of the paupers who entered the new Workhouse on June 7th 'rec'd from old Elham Union workhouse'. They were all numbered; the early books all have a column for 'number affixed to pauper's clothing', and there were the few, necessary, details. Most important were parish of settlement, (who paid the bill) and diet, (how much the bill would be). Three paupers, nos 40, 41 and 42 came from Stelling; Elizabeth Church, aged 73, Mary Andrews, aged 23 and Richard Mummery, a labourer, aged 42. They were joined, ten days later, by Henry Horton, a labourer aged 73, who was given the number 56. In August Horton and Mummery both died and the Board allowed funeral expenses of 11/- and 5/- for the sexton in each case.

Later in the year the Guardians bought in the supplies the House still lacked. They needed more blankets as the winter approached and Mr Magus was asked to supply 50 pairs @ 11/2 a pair (marked no 1 on sample) and Mr Scott sold them 50 rugs @ 3/5½ ea. (These were originally part of the tender for bedding and were, presumably, bed-covers.) The Clerk was directed to write to J.S.Taylor, 37 Strand, London, to supply the Union with:

2 doz trusses to support Ruptures without understraps	@ 3/6 ea.
1 doz with ..	@ 4/- ea.
1 doz double	@ 7/- ea.

They then accepted Mr Tucker's contract for the supply of coffins 'To be made ¾ inch thick and planed and to be delivered free of expense in any part of the Union at 14/6 each coffin.' As a final gesture they resolved on the 16th December that 'in addition to Roast Beef and Plum Pudding to be allowed to the Paupers in the House on Christmas Day, they be allowed some Beer, according to the discretion of the Governor.' Their last meeting of the year was cancelled 'owing to a great fall of snow which completely blocked up the roads.'

The Guardians could pride themselves on a good eighteen months' work. Sir Francis Bond Head sent a congratulatory circular to the Unions:

'You are now sufficiently armed to protect the Poor Rates of your Country, to repel every species of attack upon them, to detect every case of imposition to crush every attempt of intimidation and force (into employment) as soon as you should deem it necessary all those who would indolently hang on their parishes for support.'

Then he resigned, well satisfied. Certainly no modern institution would come into being so quickly, so seemingly efficiently. But maybe all was not as it seemed. The next year the problems began. The purpose-built buildings did not seem to fit the purpose they were designed for. Within the next twelve months the Guardians decided to turn the Chapel into an infirmary, build a new Chapel between the Men's and Women's Wards, turn a store room into the Committee Room, the Committee Room into the Registry Office and build a new store room. They converted 8 dormitories into 4 and built a chimney up the middle, built stabling for 10 horses (their own, presumably) in the right wing of the men's yard, built a 5 foot brick wall at the front, then to the West, then to the East.

The Chaplain resigned in March and wasn't replaced till June; the Poor Rate Collector refused to collect from Folkestone. A new Schoolmaster and Schoolmistress, Mr and Mrs Darby from Folkestone, were appointed in July. In November there were complaints about the new Schoolmistress and the new Chaplain resigned in December and was asked before the Board to clear up a charge against 'some person or some proceedings' not fully explained.

Meanwhile the Guardians tried to find jobs for the boys they had on their hands and agreed 'That the Clerk be directed to take the names and ages of the Boys in the Workhouse and to write a list of them belonging to the respective Parishes, to the Parish Officers within the Union. To solicit them to lay the said list before the Parishioners in Vestry with a view of obtaining employment for the said boys.' and they even considered having the ground in front of the Workhouse consecrated as a burial ground to save burial costs. They wrote to Canterbury and Mevagessy about John Parnell and Richard Burton and in each case refused to send money but directed that 'the pauper must be removed in the usual way.' It is a long way from Cornwall to Elham but it made no difference to the rules. Sarah Tedhams, aged 21, may have been living in Stelling but she belonged to the parish of Hastingleigh, so they wrote to the Relieving Officer of the East Ashford Union 'as to this case'.

As the Union filled, although it had by no means reached its later average content of 350 paupers in winter and 250 in summer, uniforms and shoes were getting scarce. The Guardians accepted the tender of Mr Wooton of Canterbury (to clothe the paupers in the Workhouse)

2 pieces of blue striped cotton shirting	@ 11¼d per yd
3 doz pair mans worsted stockings	@ 19½d pr
2 doz .. boy's	@ 15d pr
2 pieces Grogram	@ 7d yd
1 piece Lincey Woolsey	@ 15¾d yd
2 pieces Check for aprons	@ 11d yd
1 piece Scotch sheeting	@ 7¾d yd
50 yds Fustian	@ 15½d yd
35 yds dark green for Gaberdines	@ 15d yd

The paupers themselves would sew the garments, of regulation cut and said to be as distinctive as convict uniform. The little girls would be required to do 'industrial training' for a third of their education and many did little else but sit in lines and do the sewing and mending of the House. The last problem of the year was beyond the scope of the Board's knowledge and they sent a letter to Sir Edward Knatchbull asking him to explain the Commissioners' letter on the problem of providing a free passage for Mrs Hart and her family, who wished to join her husband who 'is transported to Van Dieman's Land.' Even their little gesture of goodwill was frowned on. The District Auditors found their bill for roast beef and plum pudding and they were told by the Commissioners that they were not allowed extra dinners on Christmas Day so, from then on, the paupers' Christmas Dinner consisted in whatever the menu for the day provided.

The problems of the Guardians did not go away. They continued to lose Chaplains faster than they could employ them and eventually wrote in despair to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Schoolmistresses came and went, usually under a cloud. The Poor Rate Collector was always resigning. The bakers of Folkestone needed constant reminding that they must be 'more particular in attending to the conditions and intentions of (their) contract'. The bread was frequently found to be of inferior quality or underweight. Francis Castle may well have regretted this onerous, unpaid task but was no doubt still reassured by Sir Francis Head's letter and, remembering the riots of 1830 and his own fellow parishioners' part in them, he no doubt felt that his sacrifice was necessary.

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