

**ULLESTHORPE
OVERSEERS' ACCOUNTS
BY HUGH GOODACRE**

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AMONG the parochial archives of Ullesthorpe are preserved the accounts of the Overseers of the Poor from the middle of the eighteenth century. They throw an interesting light upon village life of the period. In Ullesthorpe there were two Overseers, who were elected annually in April. It is with the accounts of these officials that this paper deals.

The first few pages of the earliest account book are missing, but, from entries at the end, it is possible to give the names of the Overseers from 1741 to 1750, from which date, down to 1770, the entries are apparently complete. That the accounts were subject to official audit appears from the following somewhat exuberant entry:—

April

12	Bevin price for riting	0	0	0
	out the ouer Seyers	0	0	0
	Counts of the Poor &	0	0	0
	Last years past to be	0	0	0
	carried in at the Justes	0	0	0
	Meeting	2	0	

There is also the entry of the payment of a shilling to “ye Lord Fielding for handing (*i.e.*, putting his hand to—signing) ye Levey”, which was the means by which the Overseers raised the money necessary to meet their expenses.

The first interest centres round the Overseers themselves, for it is they who still speak to us in their own crude handwriting and phonetic rendering of the then current vernacular. No doubt they were mostly farmers, horny-handed sons of the soil, whose achievements in the liberal arts stopped short at the three R's, but it is just the primitiveness of their chronicle which lends it its fascination. As we puzzle over the cryptic letters and contractions, many an obsolete word discloses itself, and we hear again, almost as clearly as if spoken, the local speech of long ago. “Barns garl had the small pox”, write the Overseers of 1767, recording the fact that Ben's girl had had the smallpox, the

victim, as we learn from an earlier entry, having been the daughter of a certain Benjamin Foxon. "Paid Mr. Arnott at a Meeting consarning the Baker Gilbert" is another entry of the same year; while the Overseers of 1764 paid Mrs. Garrett for Victuals and Drink for Thomas Harbet and "the men that look aftrem" (after him) "1 10 0".

Most of the items admit of rough classification. There are those concerning payments to recipients of Poor Relief; others connected with the purchase of clothing, food and necessaries; others relating to housing, nursing and burial; others again to the apprenticeship of children; while yet others have reference to legal matters in which the Overseers themselves have been involved.

Amongst the earliest entries are payments to Justices Caldecot and Feilding of sums varying from one to three shillings for "worands" (warrants), orders, etc. The spelling of Justice Caldecot's name has greatly exercised the worthy Overseers, and it takes some ingenuity to distinguish it in "iusts Catdcort".

In 1758 there is an item: "pd for worrاند for ye soulder" (soldier), and in 1762 for "a worrاند to take Bennit for omitinus". This is followed by: "pd ye supeneys (subpœna) for John Wells and serving it on him 0 01 0".

William Granger and John Lord, during their term of office in 1766, seem to have been involved in considerable litigation, for we read:—

pd Mr Herrick for his advice for Retaining	0 10 0
pd for Retaining Mr Vaun (? Vaughan)	0 10 6
pd frier (? Freer) for going to Leicester	0 1 6
his charges for hors	0 2 0
pd Herrick & Vaun for pleading	1 1 0
pd My Mair Carrying double (? pillion)	0 2 0
pd at the Saracens head Leicester	1 2 4
pd Mr. Herrick to appear against Nickls	
at the Sessions	0 5 0
pd Lutterworth offesr (officer) for Breving	
(briefing) Jesseard	1 2 3
pd John Crane and moses Hints for garding	
Silvester Nickles	0 2 0

The succeeding Overseers seem also to have been at law, for we find them paying Mr. Herrick, "the Loyer", the sum of

fifteen shillings, in addition to a sum of sixteen shillings which they spent at the "Cishions" (Sessions) for "triflings" (? small amounts, triflings).

With some of the recipients of relief we become on terms of considerable intimacy. For instance there is a Lydia Thornton, for whom the Overseers purchased a pair of shoes in 1751 and entered "Paied for one paier of Shoes for Liedy Thorton 0 3 6". The year contains an entry which is suggestive of the happy disposal of Lidy, who is probably a parish ward, "Pd for a lisanse for lidy and marren (? marrying) 1 13 0". There are other items at this date upon which we can build up a plausible romance, but it must be confessed that there is a considerable element of uncertainty, and poor Lidy may after all have ended her days as a spinster, or she may even have been an old wrinkled woman when we first meet with her. However, there is the "lisanse" and the "marren", followed by what may possibly have been her trousseau, namely "a shirt an aparn" (costing three shillings), "stokins" (costing five pence) and "shift" (costing two and six pence); immediately after which we have the suggestive item "paid John Gilberd for cote And a pad and crupper and holstrs and Geth for lidy 0 6 0". Did the parish come down handsome and launch the bride on a palfrey? At any rate we hear no more of Lydia Thornton.

But in 1752, the year in which we lose sight of Lidy, we become acquainted with a Nell Payne. Our first introduction is contained in the following curiously-assorted entry: "pd for a hat and Remufen (removing) Nels goods 0 0 6". The same sum is shortly after paid for "Nel payn logins", and this entry is in turn followed by another complex item, which reads: "For repairing the chimene and for coals and gose (gorse) a handcaher and bred and other things 0 1 6".

Although Nell appears to have suffered from some disability, it was evidently insufficient to incapacitate her from earning an honest shilling when the opportunity presented itself, for we find the Overseers of 1755 paying her this sum for "cleaning Whitmore's bed and children". That she suffered from one of her legs is evident, for we read of the Overseers' purchasing salve for it, and paying two and six for dressing it.

We are, I think, justified in assuming that Nell Payne was by way of being a widow, for with strange possessives, we

are told of "nells Pains ghearl". There are many entries referring to this girl, spelt indiscriminately *girl*, *gerl*, *girle* and *ghearl*.

Naturally, many of the Overseers' payments are for nursing and medical treatment. The word "nosing" is of frequent occurrence for nursing.

Pd John Lay (? Lee) For His wif nosing	
Elenor Ross	0 6 0
Paid fane (Fanny) fox son (Foxon) for	
noesen of Dan foxons wife	0 9 0

One of the medical practitioners of the day was a Dr. Burdett whose name appears under various disguises. "pd Dor Bordet for cuering holingworth finger" reads one entry. Dr. Wright was another medical man who received a guinea for "curing Hannah Sharmans Breast" Yet another was Dr. Jarvis who was paid five and three pence for "Docteren the Warkae" (Workhouse, or, possibly, the inmates of the Workhouse).

Concerning this Workhouse there are several entries. At the commencement of the accounts the paupers would seem to have been housed in various cottages scattered about the village, and there are a number of inventories at the end of the book of the humble contents of these homes. They make curious reading and testify to the primitive conditions under which these old parishioners of ours lived. In 1761, however, the poor seem to have been gathered together under one roof, known as the Workhouse, for we read: "Spent when the poor went to the workhouse in bred & Chees & ale 0 3 6". It is probable that the Workhouse was only partially completed at the above date, for seven years later we get the entries: "pd for two Loads of Stones to lay the groundsill of the Workhouse", and: "pd for Eating & Drinking when they fetched the stones from Sapcote". Then, a little further on, we get: "Spent when the Wood was Laid Upon the Workhouse 0 1 0". That the Workhouse was occupied in 1768 is attested by the following entry: "pd for Areing (airing) the Bed in the Workhouse 0 0 6".

But to return to the treatment of the inmates. Poor Mary Whitmore, for cleaning whose bed and children we have already seen the Overseers paying one shilling, had evidently become a mother, for we read: "paid for Mariy Wittmore Chargies of Ljeninge (lying-in) 1 4 2", while another entry records the burial of Mary Whitmore's child.

Malt was in use for poultices, and we learn that "three galons of Molt for poulitis" cost one and fourpence.

Nell Payne was by no means the only inmate who suffered from her legs, and the treatment prescribed takes the form, in one instance, of "burnin opes", costing two pence, and in another of "burno [long S] ses", costing fourpence, but I suspect the difference exists mainly in the rendering of the scribe. In spite of the "burnosses" the condition of a Widow Moore's legs evidently became critical, for we find the Overseers paying someone ten shillings for sitting up twenty nights with her; and this in addition to one and fourpence for candles. Eventually Dr. Wright was called in, and we hear no more of the good widow and her legs.

But Dr. Burdett was not so successful with one of his patients. He prescribed "Batman's Drops" at a shilling "a botal", and we get an insight into the cost of a funeral.

hope (?) & a. tkadany (ackedavy, affidavit)	0	4	6
payd for bell & grave	0	1	8
pd the barers	0	1	6
pd for ye coffin	0	8	0

There are several references to smallpox, and one to one of the smaller evils. "Payne (payen, paid) Fanny", we read, "for Dressing William Stievenson of ye Itch".

The cost of maternity cases compares favourably with those of to-day. Witness:—

Pd Hanow (Hannah) Shearmans for Lyingin	0	12	00
pd ye Mid Wife for Sherman	0	02	06

But the ladies did not have all the parochial consolations. James Williams got one and eleven pence "When His Whife Whas Bad", and John Lord a quart of ale "When the mad dog whas in the 'Town".

It is interesting to compare some of the prices paid by the Overseers for commodities with those ruling to-day.

A porriegepot 3 Jerons Bears (? Ierons, Irons; bearers)	0	2	3
A cheaier (chair)	0	1	0
10 yards of cloth for a pare of Sheets	0	6	8
Thrid & buttons	0	0	3
a bed cord	0	1	0
a blankit	0	2	0

Pair of Stays	0	1	6
Two pair of stokins	0	1	8
2 Laces	0	0	1
2 yards of tamey for frock	0	2	2
Butter Shuger & Oatmeal	0	0	5
two pound mutton & turnops	0	0	5½

From the accounts we get an idea, not merely of the cost of apprenticing a child, but of the appearance of the apprentice as turned out by the parish. For instance we read:—

Close (clothes) for Hannah Whitmore			
1 petticoate, 1 pair of stays	0	7	6
1 pair of shoes & 1 pair of stokins	0	3	6
1 Cap, 1 Apron, 1 Handkerchief & making	0	2	3
1 hat & shift & making	0	3	6
Paid for James Williamson's Boy			
a Coat & Whesscoat	0	7	6
& a pare of Britches too	0	6	6

Upon the apprenticeship of Benjamin Foxon the Overseers paid for "a Nother Hatt and making up his coat and shirt 0 2 6". They also paid fifteen shillings to Mr. Smith (no doubt Mr. Holled Smith, the lawyer, of Leire) for filling up the "indenters" and making the bonds. In addition the Justices received two shillings for "Handing the Indentors".

The Overseers were evidently kindly-disposed men, conscientiously discharging their duty according to their lights. Some of them, no doubt, were fathers, and from the following obscure entry we may gather that they did not overlook the children of the parish. "Paid", it reads, "Mary Hurst for Making Some Smalltings for the Childering (childeren, children)". What "smalltings" exactly signifies I do not know. It may mean "small things", or it may have been the specific name of some comestible, but, whatever it was, it was not an expensive luxury as its manufacture only cost three pence.

There is many another dubious item in the accounts: I have only attempted a selection. Naturally there are references to contemporary personages and events, the memory of which has passed beyond recall, but still an hour or so can be profitably and enjoyably spent over the old faded leaves, and the curious left to puzzle over such strange words as "focaggist", "bur-nosses", "smalltings", and many more.