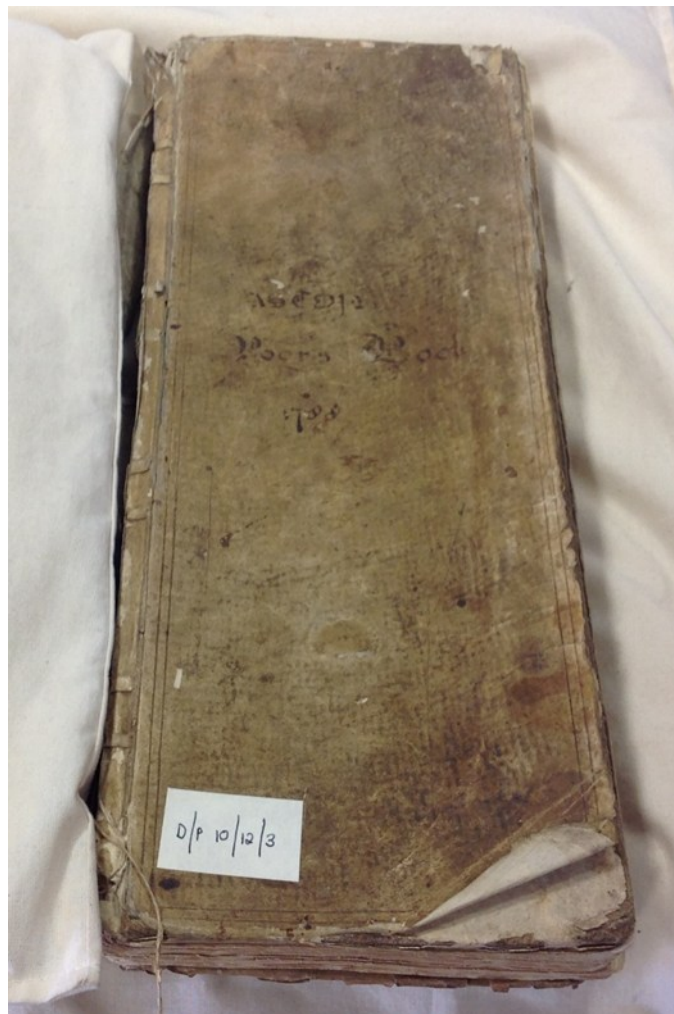


# The Astons Poor Relief Book

1788-1821

A partial transcript, with research and annotation  
by Stephen Whitwell and Judy Barradell-Smith



Astons History Group

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## THE ASTONS POOR RELIEF BOOK: 1788-1821.

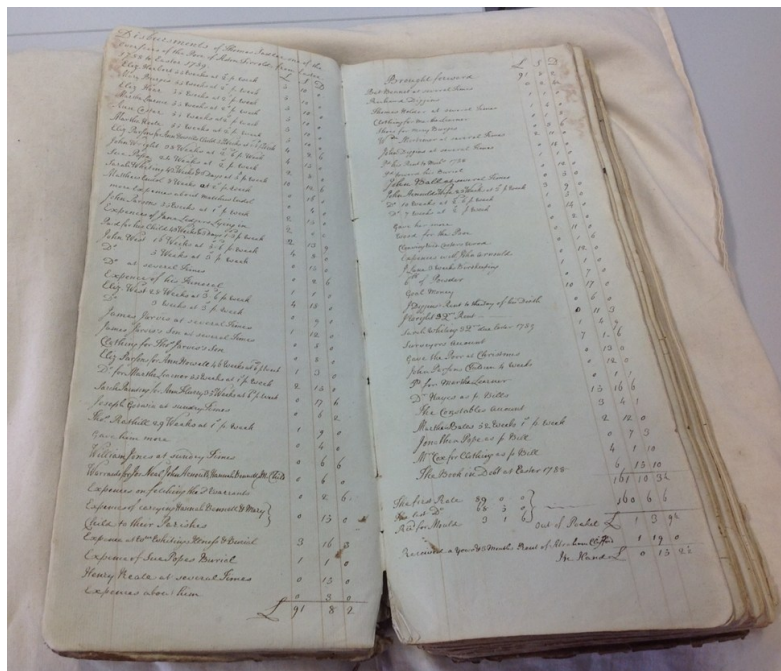
The Astons Poor Relief Book is a record of aid given to individuals living within the parish of Aston Tirrold for the years indicated. The book covers only the village of Aston Tirrold, as Aston Upton came under the parish of Blewbury and Upton until 1924. It is a rare survivor, and we are lucky to have such a detailed record. The original of the book is held in the Berkshire Record Office (Overseers Poor Book, accounts and poor rates. (BRO ref. D/P10/12/3)

Initial research was done in the early 1980s by Stephen Whitwell, an Astons resident, for his 1984 exhibition at Wallingford Museum: Tirrold and Upton: a portrait of the Astons. I have not attempted to re-write or alter in any way Stephen's original notes.

This publication includes a transcript of Stephen's research notes, interspersed with additional information by myself on some of the individuals or incidents mentioned in the book.

Although the period the Poor Relief Book covers pre-dates the first surviving census of 1841, some data has been gathered from early census material. Parish church records have similarly been used where relevant. My notes are in blue, with the original wording by Stephen Whitwell in black. Illustrations are from the Astons History Group's archive, unless otherwise stated (captions are in black).

Judy Barradell-Smith. 2023.



A page from the Astons Poor Relief Book, giving names of recipients, amounts given and the purpose for which relief was given.

## WHAT WAS PARISH RELIEF?

The system of parish relief in place at the time the Astons Poor Relief Book had been established during the sixteenth century, when a rapidly rising population had coincided with widespread social disruption caused by the breaking up of monastic estates by Henry VIII.

To deal with these problems, Elizabeth I passed the Poor Law of 1552 and the Poor Relief Act of 1601, which together gave parish authorities the power to charge a rate for the relief of poverty, and also defined and restricted the categories of poor that a parish was obliged to support. See *Appendix One: Legal settlement and removal*.

In the centuries preceding the Elizabethan reforms, both secular and ecclesiastical matters were managed at the parish level by a local body which originally met in the vestry or sacristy of the parish church, and which consequently became known colloquially as 'the vestry.'

The Poor Law of 1601 made vestries responsible for the care of the poor of the parish and it was this body therefore that managed the poor relief system. Two men, drawn from the land-owning members of the parish, would be nominated to serve for a period of two years as "overseers" of the parish poor relief, and were responsible for identifying those in need, setting the poor rate and arranging its collection. The funding was provided by a tax on all landowners or rate payers, set by the overseers and based on the value of property.

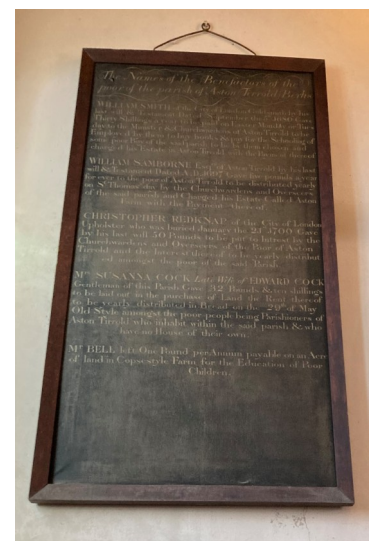
*After 1834, the system was gradually changed by Parliament as it responded to the growth of the large industrial towns and their very different problems. Poor relief then became the responsibility of local Work Unions, and parish relief was no longer available. This led to a far from satisfactory system where the neediest were removed to workhouses in larger towns and men and their wives and children were separated from each other. Workhouses were supposed to show they could make a profit and some awful abuses, cruelty and corruption took place as described in contemporary literature such as Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* and Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*.*

**CHARITABLE RELIEF:** It should be noted that there was also a long established practice of charitable relief using funds collected in churches and through individual bequests. Funds from these sources were used either for general relief, or for specific causes such as 'bread for a poor widow,' 'education for a poor boy.' or a sum of money for the poor of a particular parish.

I have identified a number of these in local wills where they usually were administered by the deceased's executors, but it was often left to the local clergyman to decide who was to benefit. These were ad hoc gifts and did not normally provide regular payment or support.

However, on the 1808 Aston Tirrold Enclosure Map I identified an area of land designated "Aston Tirrold Poor." Further investigations revealed that in 1762 Susannah COCK, an inhabitant of Aston Tirrold died and left £32.10s to be used for the purchase of a piece of land in the village. The rents raised from it would be distributed on 29<sup>th</sup> May each year to the poor of Aston Tirrold.

This endowment was reassigned after the Act of Enclosure for Aston Tirrold in 1817 and a separate strip of land was bought measuring 1 acre. The annual revenue, albeit quite small, was used to help the poor of the village - indeed we know that in 1923 it was producing an annual rental of around £3, which was distributed in bread amongst the poor of the village.



*Above: St. Michael's Church plaque showing bequests*

Details in the Astons Poor Relief book confirm that the system in Aston Tirrold was administered by the elected overseers of the poor. Overseers would respond to the need of an individual, with little or no moralising (for example if a woman had a child born out of wedlock) and could ignore comments as to whether giving aid was right or wrong.

From this book we can see parish relief being given to support illegitimate children and unmarried mothers, the old and chronically sick, to transport a man charged with sheep stealing to court and also to causes which would benefit the whole village, such as paying for smallpox vaccinations.

It operated on truly egalitarian principles and gave aid where it was needed and for however long it was needed. Each case was assessed regularly and the type of aid, the amount of aid and the duration of the aid were adjusted as necessary.

Rather than the individual having to come begging, those in charge of parish relief knew exactly who was in need. The book shows remarkable insight into village life and the overseers' understanding of the circumstances of every person within the parish.

I am not trying to paint this as a rosy picture. It is clear those on parish relief would have preferred not to be, and undoubtedly it carried with it the stigma of pauper, a term often entered in the burial book of St Michael's Church. Parish relief offered only the bare minimum to survive and it is clear that some individuals opted in and out of the system when, for example, they had the opportunity of seasonal work, or could go and live with a relative.

The Astons have some interesting sources from later in the nineteenth century that detail village life, but this early Astons Poor Relief Book is a treasure trove of information and insights about some of the inhabitants within one small community.

History is frequently written by or about the rich and famous, but these individual stories are about some of the poorest and most disadvantaged inhabitants of Aston Tirrold, and are just as fascinating.

Stephen gave the Astons so much during his time in the village - not just his research on many different topics, but through his many photos and illustrations that continue to be enjoyed, and have themselves become a record of times past - so we are very pleased to highlight his enduring contribution with this new publication.



*Watercolour of St. Michael's Church, by Stephen Whitwell.*

## STEPHEN WHITWELL'S RESEARCH:

Stephen's research into the Astons Poor Relief Book was part of a wider programme of research carried out for his 1984 exhibition at Wallingford Museum: 'Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe: a portrait of the Astons'. The entry below is Stephen's text from that exhibition:

Before 1834, the Poor Rate was levied by the 2 men elected at the Annual Vestry meeting to be overseers of the poor, on property owners in the parish, and disbursed by the same 2 men.

The book is their account book kept by the overseers themselves. The Fullers head the list of property owners for the whole period, John Fuller of Copse Style and Thomas Fuller of the Manor and one or other of them is for most years an overseer. The account was checked by 2 Justices of the Peace, in later years often John ALLNATT and Edward WELLS of Wallingford.

The disbursements show a very high level of personal care for and interest in the poor of the parish. Rates were varied to cope with bad years; individual stories can be traced, if not quite from the cradle, certainly to the grave. Children, the sick and the old were helped in both the short and the long term. Such a standard of care was probably only possible in a small community where people all knew each other.

The following notes (in black) were made by Stephen Whitwell following his visit to the Berkshire Record Office to view the Aston Tirrold Poor Relief Book. A more recent visit by us has been made to the Berkshire Record Office to view the book again, and additional notes were taken which provided clarification on some entries.

Pre decimal currency: prior to decimalisation, the pound was divided into 20 shillings (indicated as 1/-). Each shilling was divided into 12 (old) pennies (indicated as /- or d). Thus there were 240 old pennies to the pound.

### Astons Poor Relief Book 1788-1820

In the days before 1834 when relief for the poor was governed by Acts of Parliament starting in 1601, the Poor Rate was levied by the two men elected for the year as Overseers of the Poor, on property owners in the parish. The same men distributed this money to the poor in the same parish. Both types of people were well known to each other, and the needs of the poor in the village could be easily assessed. Thus, the relief given is tailored for each individual case, a pair of shoes mended, a waistcoat bought, the rent paid, fuel purchased, the roof mended. It is only towards the end of the period covered by this book, when distress was greatly increased by a series of bad harvests, by the results of the Napoleonic wars and other national factors that more and more money had to be raised to pay for food for the poor.

For most of the 32 years covered by this book, the poor rate disbursements show an intimate knowledge possessed by the overseers of the needs of the village poor, and a willingness to help in both short-term needs, and in long term help for the old and the sick and children.

### The Bad Years

In normal times, those who received relief were the old, widows and children, on a regular "pension" basis. The sick were also assisted, though in general this was more on a short term basis. But there were years when bad harvests sent up the price of grain, and other years when prolonged bad weather made many out of work temporarily. All this is reflected in the poor rate, as this was not a definite figure, but altered to keep pace with the need. So, we can identify the bad years.

1794 was notorious for a bad harvest nationally, and by 1795 the rate had jumped from £233 to £428 to avert the threat of mass starvation. 1800 and 1801 were epidemic years, though we do not know what it was: merely that there are long lists of people ill. Things got back to normal after that for some time and in

1808 the amount raised was only £177.0s 0d. But by 1809 it was £660.0s.0d.

I compared the non-conformist Aston Tirrold death registry for the years 1800 and 1801 for five years either side of those dates and there were in fact fewer than average deaths recorded in the parish during those two years. No causes of death are given. In St Michael's burial register, average deaths per year in this period run at about 10 per year. 1799 has 8, 1800 has 12, 1801 has 8 and 1802 has 7. I also looked at the neighbouring parishes of Cholsey and Blewbury and again saw no noticeable increase in deaths for 1800 and 1801.

The roll out of the smallpox vaccine from around 1790 (see more on the village smallpox vaccination programme further on) saw a rapid decline in smallpox outbreaks. Smallpox, pre vaccination, was the biggest killer with a mortality rate of about a third of those who were infected - it was probably the most contagious virus ever known. I suspect the notes made by Stephen Whitwell reflect an increase in illnesses in the parish but not necessarily deaths. 1800 and 1801 are known in Berkshire to be two years of extremely poor harvests which led to an increase in malnutrition and disease.

The increase in the Parish rate seems to have been again the result of bad harvests forcing food prices up beyond the reach of agricultural labourer's wages.

The Berkshire "Speenhamland" parish rate test was applied in many parishes that tried to link the increase in the price of bread to an increase in the parish poor rate. The price of wheat soared during the Napoleonic war years whilst agricultural labourers' wages stagnated. David Davies (a local Berkshire farmer) and Frederick Eden (a local Rector in Barkham, Berkshire) wrote a series of essays called 'The Case of Labourers in Husbandry and the State of the Poor' (1795-1797).

In this they concluded that an average farm labourer, married with a family of 3-6 children, needed a yearly income of £26 to be able to survive at the most basic level and this calculation was linked to the price of wheat per bushel - wheat had been 37 shillings per bushel in 1770, 77 shillings by the late 1790s and to nearly 85 shillings per bushel in 1801.

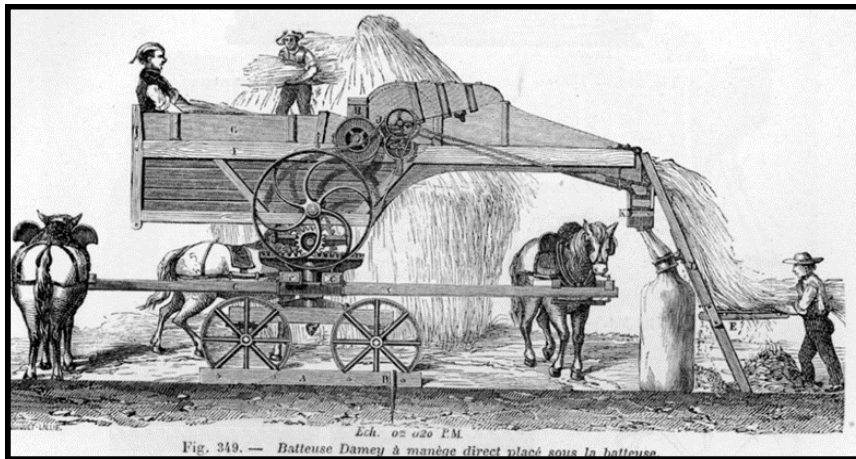
Alongside this increase in the price of wheat - which was reflected in the price of bread - the staple food stuff for all farm labourers) labourers' wages hardly rose at all, and it was almost impossible to supplement these wages. It was estimated that on average a farm labourer ate 1lb of bread (454g) per day, In general women who were mothers were only able to supplement their husband's wages by doing odd bits of work over the harvest period. On the other hand, once boys reached the age of 10 or 11 they could get work as carter's boys, errand boys or helping out on the farm, for which they might receive a small wage, however these jobs were mostly seasonal. Summertime was not the period of most need as many families supplemented their diet with home grown vegetables in their gardens or from the strips of land available in the common fields or through picking edible plants from the hedgerows and fields. Winter was the time of hardship and struggle when many men were laid off or put on reduced pay.

This shortfall in wages against the price of bread left a serious weekly deficit between just getting by and being short of food. Hence parish poor relief reflected the inability of a labourer's family to make up this shortfall in wages.

Thomas R Malthus (1766-1834) - an English cleric, scholar and economist influential in the fields of political economy and demography - believed that the labouring poor if well fed would breed more and thus increase the size of their families and overrun the ability of a country to provide for itself. His demographic principles advocated a reduction or a stabilizing of the growth in population size through natural selection, which included disease, epidemics and starvation. He did not believe the Government

should actively do anything much to alleviate it! Malthus was very much against the principle of a more generous form of parish relief. Luckily the Aston overseers did not follow his principles].

The end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815 heralds the next crisis, returning demobilized soldiers to their home villages. In the same year (1815), the threshing machine was invented and rapidly spread throughout the agricultural area.



*A horsepower threshing machine at work, resulted in less labour needed at harvest time.*

In 1816 and 1817 our book shows a massive increase in relief being needed for those “out of work” (this may have included those returning injured and disabled from the wars) and the rate jumped to £807.0s.0d per annum in 1816 and £848.0s.0d in the following year. After this, things slowly improved, probably because the young able-bodied people migrated to the industrial towns or emigrated to find a better life in the colonies.

We can find no evidence to show if either of the above (migration to towns or emigration) took place locally, but it is likely to have happened on a small scale. For local jobs outside of agriculture we can cite the following:

H&G Simonds, Brewers of Reading set up in the late 1780s.

Sutton Seeds of Reading founded in 1806.

Huntley and Palmers (biscuits) of Reading began in 1822.

These industries may have encouraged younger members of the village to leave agricultural work and move to the towns.

We have no accurate figures to compare the population of Aston Tirrold prior to 1801 but we do have a headcount based on the 1801 census (the first of its kind) which was mostly a tally of those living in the village - including gender but not age. The headcount for Aston Tirrold in 1801 was 294, in 1811 it has risen to 324, and in 1821 it had risen again to 355.

The 2020 population for Aston Tirrold was estimated at 376, therefore there has not been that much change in population numbers in 200 years. In 1801 there were fewer houses in the village than today, but larger numbers of people in each household - an average household in 1801 in England was six people.

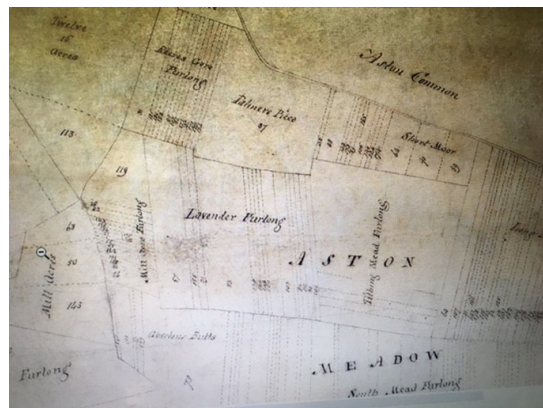
Labourers were far more mobile than has historically been supposed, and word of mouth plus advertisements for alternative work or overseas opportunities often circulated. Statistics show that popular destinations such as USA, Canada, South America, New Zealand and Australia attracted over two million

people from 1815 to the end of the century. However, from the census statistics available, it does not look as if the population in Aston Tirrold declined at all between 1800 – 1811, in fact it increased.

A possible reason for the massive increase in poor relief in the years 1816 and 1817 might be the Aston Tirrold Enclosure Act of 1808, which in one fell swoop deprived the labouring poor of access to land where they had historically grown crops. It also ended access to the Astons' common land, where they had rights to gather anything from the hedgerows or fields, to put to pasture cows or sheep (if they owned any) or to gather wood for burning. This process began in 1808 and was completed by 1817.

This section of the 1808 enclosure map (right) shows the numerous ancient strip cultivation lands, each of which was 'owned' by individual householders to use for their own benefit. At the top of the map is the area known as Aston Common where labourer families had the right to glean, collect firewood and graze animals.

I believe the increase in poor relief surely reflected the effects of these enclosures. Acts of Enclosure were enacted throughout England and were the greatest ever land grab by the rich and powerful land-owning classes.



A list of people in Aston Tirrold who, over the period covered in the book, (1788 – 1820) served 2 years at a time as a Poor Relief Overseer and the same people can be seen serving over and over again.

- Benjamin BLACKMAN
- William BUSHNELL
- Benjamin FINCH
- Thomas FULLER
- T.H FULLER
- Thomas FULLER (junior)
- John FULLER
- John GALE
- Richard HERBERT
- Benjamin PARSONS
- William PARSONS
- George POPE
- Thomas SADLER
- William STIMSON (difficult to read -could be SIMSON)

The Aston Tirrold overseers included both Dissenters (Presbyterian, now United Reformed Church), such as the FULLER, PARSONS, POPE, SADLER, BLACKMAN and FINCH families, and Church of England families, such as the GALE, HERBERT and BUSHNELL families.

Reassuringly, decisions on relief were not influenced by either of the Churches, who might otherwise have applied religious or moral considerations on how individuals had lived their lives that had led to their need for relief.

## SOME PERSONAL STORIES:

### The “deaf and dumb” boy.

His actual name is never mentioned, nor his age. He is first mentioned in 1801, when he is lodged with Richard Parsons, who is given 4/- (4 shillings) a week for his keep. In 1802 the parish pays 7d (7 pence) to have his shoes mended, then buys him a pair at 8/3 (8 shillings and 3 pence) and another at 9/6. From these prices, which are the same as that paid for shoes for an adult man, we can take him to be a well grown lad. He also gets a great coat for 15/-. In 1803 he is ill, and he, or Richard Parsons or possibly the doctor is paid 5/6. His shoes are mended again, costing 6d this time, but he needs another pair at 9/6 before the end of the year. He is also bought a smock frock for 7/-. No further mention is made of him.

The first census that records deaf and dumb data is that of 1851. I checked it in case he may still have been living in Aston Tirrold by then, but there are no entries for anyone of his age marked as deaf or dumb. We will probably never know who he was. We have however learnt that a family called PARSONS operated the toll house at the junction of Chalk Hill with the A 417 (the Turnpike Road) during this period. This boy may have lodged with them. PARSONS are also shown as serving as overseers of the Parish Relief on several occasions.

### Martha LEARNER or LARNER.

First mentioned at the beginning of the book (circa 1788) so we have no means of knowing how long she had already been on relief. She is allowed 2/- weekly and Elizabeth Parsons gets 1/- weekly for her board and lodging.

In 1792 her allowance is increased to 3/- per week.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Cost</u>
1797	A pair of shoes	5/-
1799	2 shifts are made for her costing	4/6
	Pair of shoes	4/6
	A gown	9/6
1800	An extra payment given	3/-
	Petticoat + stockings	6/10
	Gown	9/6

During the winter of 1801 her relief is 3/6 per week for 6 weeks, plus an extra 9/6. Her keep, paid to Elizabeth Parsons is still 1/- per week

<u>Date</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Cost</u>
1802	Ill in bed. She receives	6d extra twice
	Handkerchief + stockings	3/1
1804	30 weeks in the year are paid to her at 3/- a week and 22 weeks at 2/6 a week.	
1804	A cloak	2/-
1805	Her relief is returned to 3/-	
1805	Blanket + coat	10/6
	Mending shoes	1/10
	Clothes (spelt “cloathes”)	£1.9.4 ( 1 pound, 9 shilling + 4 pence)
	1 x extra payment	3/6
1807	When ill	13/6

(Presumably to cover a doctor and/or medicines?)

Elizabeth Parsons for making clothes 1/2

1809 Her keep paid to Elizabeth Parsons goes up to 1/6 weekly + her personal allowance to 4/- per week

1810 Between September and December 1810, Martha dies and her funeral expenses are given as £1.17s.0d

I cannot find any record of Martha's death in Aston Tirrold under the surname LEARNER or LARNER for 1810. There is no one called Martha buried in 1810 either at St Michael's or at the URC Chapel. There is a Martha LARDNER aged 87 who is buried in March 1811 aged 87 (born about 1724) but that does not seem to match up with Stephen's notes of a burial in the autumn of 1810. However, there is one record which I think may concern her which gives the surname as LEARNER. This shows a birth of a child called John LEARNER baptised in St Michael's, Aston Tirrold on 16 July 1758 to a mother called Martha LEARNER. There is no father's name given.

The entry in St Michael's baptism registry against the child's name says 'base born' which means Martha's child was illegitimate. There is no baptism for a Martha LEARNER, LARDNER or LARNOR anywhere in Aston Tirrold, so wherever she came from, she wasn't born in the Astons. There is no record for John LEARNER of either a marriage or burial in Aston Tirrold. If he grew to adulthood he must have moved away from the village and was not able to help support his mother during her later years. There are however records for various LEARNER, LARNOR or LARDNER persons in Aston Tirrold from 1676-1761, so Martha probably did have family here.

#### William MORTIMER's child.

This boy is never given a name. He is first mentioned in 1792. He is lodged with Richard PARSONS who receives 1/6 weekly for his keep. 3 years later in 1795 it is increased to 2/6 and at this time he is moved to the care of Robert HOLDEN.

Richard PARSONS is still living in Aston Tirrold in 1841 aged 89. There is an interesting entry for him in the Parish records - he was first admitted into the Dissenting Church (Presbyterian, now United Reformed Church) on 3 September 1789, but later was excommunicated (but no date is given and no further information given about the reason). He was baptised into the Dissenting Church in 1753, but is buried in St Michael's in 1842. Perhaps he just changed faith?

In 1798, he is referred to as William Mortimer's boy, so is no longer a young child + in this year the parish begins to buy clothing for him. Does this mean he needs to be properly kitted out to go to work?

<u>Date</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Cost</u>
1798	A hat + breeches	8/6
	Stockings + shirt	2/6
	Shoes	4/6

That year, there is also a journey to Reading 'about Mortimer's boy' costing 5/-

Was this in connection with employment for the boy, or an apprenticeship perhaps?

Also the same year " for Mortimer's son" = £3.0s.0d.

1799	Mortimer's boy receives 4/- weekly	
	Shirt + breeches	13/-
	Washing for Mortimer's boy	8/6

This amount for washing seems a very large amount unless it was the total for a whole year?

1800 Mortimer's boy receives 4/- weekly

1800      A hat, great coat + shoes      £1.3s 3d      Breeches + stockings      9/-  
He is growing fast

He continues to receive 4/- a week until Easter 1801 when he disappears from the list.

There is a William MORTIMER baptised in St Michael's on 18 May 1788 to a father called William Mortimer and a mother named as Jane LEDGER. The baptism entry reads "18 May 1788, William Mortimer LEDGER son of William MORTIMER and Jane, bastard." So, William Mortimer's boy was in fact William LEDGER, an illegitimate child.

There are five baptisms for children called MORTIMER in Aston Tirrold - in 1762, 1764, 1767, 1770 and 1772 – all to William MORTIMER and his wife Mary. William MORTIMER, father to "William Mortimer's boy," was already married when his illegitimate son was born in 1788. There is no discernible trail of what happened to William and Mary MORTIMER's various legitimate children.

I found a William MORTIMER baptised in Aston Tirrold in 1734 and a burial for William MORTIMER on 30 December 1790 in St Michael's, when young William Mortimer LEDGER was about four. William's widow Mary MORTIMER died in Aston Tirrold in 1823 aged 89.

It is pretty clear that "William MORTIMER's boy" was a result of a liaison between Jane LEDGER and William MORTIMER, who of course was unable to marry her. The name of the father is given in the child's baptism. This was often made public, especially if the mother was persuaded to name the father of the child. Parish relief was often denied if there was a living father (married or single) to provide for his child.

In this case it appears that William MORTIMER (senior) may have provided for his son and the mother up to the point when he died in 1790. Maybe the mother carried on providing for her son for a while after 1790, but by 1792 was unable or unwilling to provide for him - she may have left the village and left her son to the care of the village. I have not found a baptism or death for Jane LEDGER or Jane MORTIMER anywhere in the area. By 1792 Jane was either dead, had married or moved away.

There is, however, a record of a Jane LEDGER marrying in Moulsoford in Berkshire in 1791, which states she is a widow. This may be her, but maybe her new husband refused to take on her child. Either way by 1792 "Mortimer's boy" is being lodged with Richard Parsons and cared for by Parish Relief.

The poor relief book and Stephen's notes imply that the boy was no longer a small child by 1798, and needing clothes, perhaps for work? In 1798, William Mortimer would have been about 10. which was the age for a young lad to get a job on a local farm. In the years 1799-1800 he was again fast growing out of clothes.

He disappears from the relief book in around 1801, and I think this was maybe because his earning capacity was sufficient to provide for himself without parish relief, or maybe because he had moved away and got a job in another parish. Maybe that visit to Reading (page 7) was something to do with finding him a trade or apprenticeship to follow? I have not found any death record for him in Aston Tirrold or found him on any local census later on.

#### Joseph and Mary GODWIN.

This is the most complete story in the book. Joseph is first mentioned in 1789, when he is given odd amounts of parish relief at sundry times totalling 6/2d

In 1790 he has a spell working on the roads and is paid £3.9s.4d, but he then goes onto regular relief paid at 4/- per week.

In 1791 he is paid 4/- weekly for 50 weeks plus his rent of £1.11s.6d is paid for him. The same happens the

next year, plus he gets a pair of shoes for 2/6

The 4/- weekly amount and his rent is paid regularly to him for the next 5 years

In 1798 his wife Mary is added to the parish relief payments list and the relief goes up to 5/- weekly. This is raised to 6/- weekly in 1799 and to 7/- in 1800. In 1800, Joseph also gets an extra payment of 9/-

In 1802 there is this entry:

“Paid Robert ARNOULD for moving Joseph Godwin’s bed 1/- ”

At the same time, Mary Andrews is paid for 13 weeks at 2/- per week for waiting on him. He dies in 1803 and his funeral costs are paid for at £1.5s.0d

His widow Mary continues to receive relief at the rate of 3/- a week until she dies in 1805 and her funeral costs are met at £1.5s 0d

### What do we know about Joseph and Mary GODWIN?

Joseph married his wife Mary DISLIN in North Moreton on 20 September 1745, aged 27. I can find no baptism record for a Mary DISLIN in this area. There are no other GODWIN burials other than Joseph and Mary, and no records of other GODWIN marriages or baptisms, so I don’t think they had any children.

Joseph GODWIN was buried at St Michael’s on 13 February 1803 aged 85, so born about 1718. No baptism records are found in Aston Tirrold or nearby.

Mary GODWIN (nee DISLIN) was buried at St Michael’s on 12 May 1805. She is shown as a widow.

### Widow HOLMES.

This lady’s story covers almost the whole book and shows the gradual decline in the amount paid to the poor during this time. There is no mention of her 1<sup>st</sup> name nor that of her ‘girl’

She is first mentioned in 1793, when she receives parish relief at 5/6 weekly or £14.6s.0d annually

1801 Reduced to 3/6 a week. She gets her rent paid

1802 “Widow Holmes and her girl” – first mention of any family – get 2/6 a week. Was this because the girl may have started work?

1803 Widow Holmes at 1/6 weekly. She gets a windfall when she is paid 3/- for attending a pauper’s “lying in.” [the term given to a period just before, during and after childbirth.](#)

1804 For 20 weeks she only receives 1/- weekly with the last week paid at 1/6

Her relief then varies from 1/- to 2/- weekly until ...

1806 In addition to her allowance, her rent is paid regularly at the rate of £1.1.0 each half year

1811 Her allowance is now 2/- per week, plus one loaf a week, plus her rent is paid.

1814 Her allowance is now 1 ½ loaves per week plus her rent is paid

1815 Her rent is no longer paid

1817 7 weeks at 1 ½ loaves, the rest at only 1 loaf.

1818 Back to 1 ½ loaves per week + stays like that until 1820 at the end of the book (which stops in 1820)

Presumably when her rent is discontinued, she goes to live with her ‘girl’ (who may be married) or with another child or is lodging free of charge elsewhere?

She is shown to be in much the same position as Widow HOLMES ([see below](#)) during much the same time, who experiences a similar reduction in relief paid out. But in her case, has her rent paid throughout the period.

Widow HOLMES was born Sarah ESON in Cholsey in about 1752 - 1753. On 7 June 1774 she marries Joseph HOLMES. He was also from a Cholsey family and was probably a farm labourer.

Their first child was William HOLMES, who seems to have been baptised in Cholsey fairly soon after their wedding on 3 October 1774.

Sometime after 1774 and before 1779, the family moved to Aston Tirrold, presumably because of a better work or housing opportunity for Joseph and Sarah and their family. Their next six children are all baptised in Aston Tirrold at St Michael's as follows:

Joseph HOLMES 7 January 1779, Elizabeth HOLMES 1 April 1781, John HOLMES 15 June 1783, Jane HOLMES 12 February 1786, Sarah HOLMES 14 September 1788, and lastly Thomas HOLMES 17 April 1791.

Sarah HOLMES (Widow HOLMES) enters parish relief in 1793, at which time she would have had up to 7 children - the oldest aged 19 and the youngest Thomas born in 1791. I have found no evidence as to whether any of these children died young - there are no children named HOLMES buried in Aston Tirrold.

There is only one marriage of a HOLMES in Aston Tirrold, that of the daughter Sarah HOLMES (born about 1788) to William KEATE at St Michael's on Christmas Day 1808. If her daughter Sarah was the only child living in Aston Tirrold, she may have been working and helping add to her mother's income. After the daughter's marriage her mother may have lived with her daughter for a while, as there appears to be a period from 1815 when her records cease. In 1820 when Widow HOLMES is receiving bread weekly but no rent allowance.

Stephen Whitwell speculates that when Widow HOLMES was not receiving rent, she may have been housed with a son or daughter. She was not receiving rent allowance in 1804 (aged 48, when her youngest son would have been 17) and again in 1815 (aged 63, and her son 24). But if her eldest children, William and Joseph, were old enough to be working in 1793, aged about 19 and 14, then one would have assumed some income was coming in from them.

She seems to have had a number of able-bodied children who all seem to have survived, so why were none of them supporting her? You can be certain parish relief would not be paid to an individual if there was some other way to keep them fed and housed. As I have found no record for any of the children in Aston Tirrold other than her daughter Sarah HOLMES they had either moved away or, if working, were living away from home. Either Sarah, aged 48, was not capable of working, or only intermittently, so maybe she was disabled or ill in some way.

I must draw the conclusion that for whatever reason Sarah HOLMES was in receipt of parish relief by 1793. Sarah HOLMES, (Widow HOLMES) dies in 1838 aged 86 and is buried in St Michael's churchyard on 13 Feb 1838. Her daughter, Sarah KEATE (nee HOLMES), dies in Aston Tirrold in 1865.

What happened to her husband Joseph? There is no sign of his death or burial in Aston Tirrold. Although called Widow HOLMES, maybe Joseph had done a runner and left her with a number of small children to raise. That would indeed be a sad story, but I regret we probably won't ever know the answer to this story.

## REFERENCES TO THE 'POOR HOUSE':

In the Astons Poor Relief Book we find quite a few references to individuals or families being housed in either The Boot or The Chequers, both of which had rooms available for rent at the time.

Lodging in a pub when in receipt of poor relief was not a very good or long term solution, but it was often a struggle for the overseers to house them, as most smaller properties in the village tended to be linked to employment. Whilst the local farmers could be persuaded to be generous to a recently bereaved widow they would soon need the house back for the succeeding farm worker.

If they didn't have family who could take them in they would be placed with other families, who were paid board and lodging for them. Housing a family together was even more difficult if there were several children.

Therefore the parish poor house initiative was established to gain control over where those on parish relief could live, and allow the overseers to manage the accommodation needs and costs better.

The houses would belong to the poor relief fund, not to a private landlord, and there were probably savings to be made by running two houses. It also allowed the overseers to select the most appropriate area in the village for the housing of those in receipt of relief. I am sure they were sensitive to the views of both the rich and the ordinary people of Aston Tirrold who may not have liked the idea of a 'poor house' next door to them.

The occupants of the poor house would also be aware of the stigma of living in a poor house and wished to retain as much of their dignity as possible. Nothing seems to have come down in the village's oral testimony or written history about the location or the name of the "poor houses". Probably because it was something people wanted to forget?

It is worth speculating where these houses were. The Poor Relief Book records two houses, one that appears to be a renovation of an existing house (*called the "old Parish House"*) and one a new build house, called the "New House" (*there is no itemised bill for the new house, just a final amount*). The old Parish House was re-thatched and made over in 1796, while the New House is referred to as "up the hill" In 1791/2.

There are no records of dwellings on Spring Lane hill, so there is only one likely road in Aston Tirrold and that is Chalk Hill (*the two cottages at the end of the recreation ground are too recent as they were built by Frank Cross around 1901-1906*).

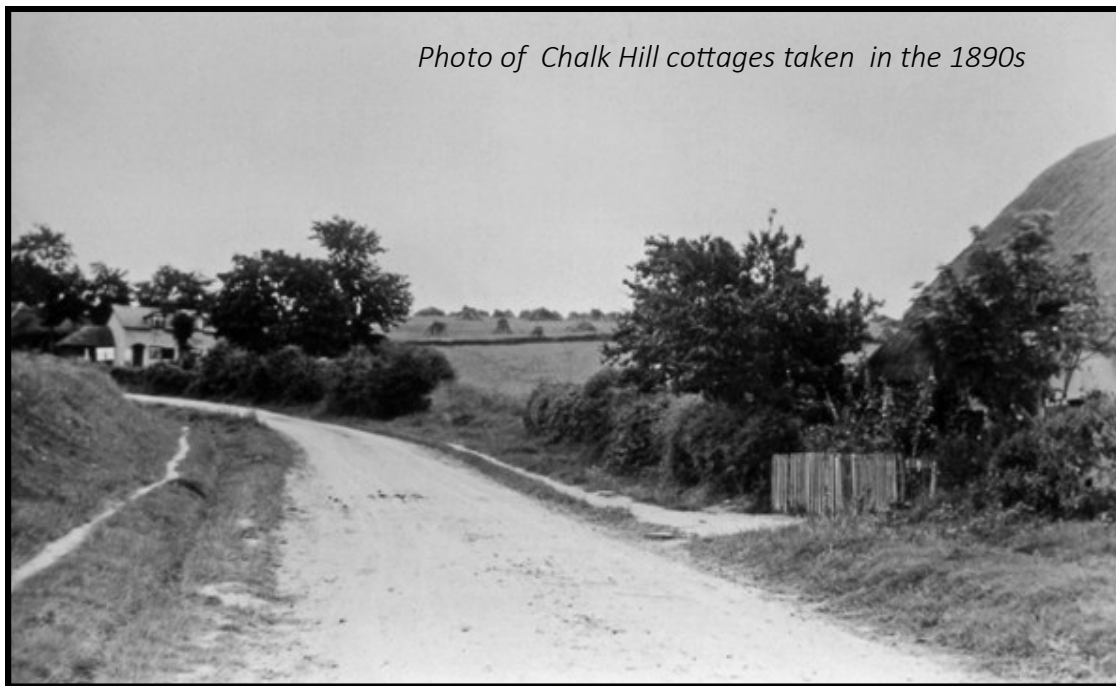


The 1808 enclosure map section (above) shows a house at the top of Chalk Hill, now called Chalk Hill Cottage (*next to the white oblong shape*) and four buildings on the opposite side of the road, at the top of

the hill on a triangle of land called “Martinico”. The map shows 2 houses next to each other on Chalk Hill at this point which I’m pretty certain are the “old” poor house, and the other the new build. I think the new build is possibly the one that is shown in the Curry photos.

The land here was owned by the Fuller family, three of whom acted as overseers of the Astons parish relief fund over the thirty-two years the book covers. It may have been one cottage or two semi-detached cottages – with one or two bedrooms upstairs, possibly used by two different families. The house would have a downstairs scullery and kitchen with a fireplace and some seating area, and an outside earth closet toilet.

The map also shows two buildings on the left of the road, and it is my theory that it was the older rather dilapidated cottage lower down on Chalk Hill that was converted into a Parish Poor House. It seems to have disappeared before this photo was taken by the Presbyterian minister Thomas Curry.



*Photo of Chalk Hill cottages taken in the 1890s*

You might ask why there were two houses? It is likely that the overseers would have felt it was unacceptable to have a man and woman who were not married sharing the same house, so maybe one house was for women and children and the other for men? Each poor house could accommodate up to eight people.

The newer house stopped being used as a poor house later in the century, possibly after the 1834 changes to the poor relief systems, and by 1900 the house was home to an farm labouring family. It shared a well with Chalk Hill Cottage and was probably suitable for up to four people to live in. We have a good account given by Gilbert Corderoy in an Astons News article in 1995 (*see Appendix 3*).

1791/1792	Paid Dixon for 4 days work at the new house	
1792	Expenses of building 2 houses for the poor £20.0.0	
	Bread for the poor 12 gallons for 14 weeks at 1/- per week	
1794	Bread for the poor	£20.2s.2d
	Bread for the poor	£35.3s.0d
	Clothes	£12.0s.0d
	Wood	£29.12s.10d

1796	Old house for the poor	
	Timber	£6.9s.10d
	Kilnware	£17.3s.11 ½ d

Kilnware was probably the building of a bread oven, or an open fireplace for cooking and warmth, maybe even a brick-built surround for a scullery boiler with a fire pit under. It might also have included a stone sink, although there would be no running water and water would be brought from the well.

	Masons	£5.8s.9d
	Labourers	£5.4s.0d
	1350 Long rods	£2.0s.6d
	Walling	£0.5s.0d
	Straw	£3.10s.0d
	Thatching	£2.5s.0d
	9 loads of gravel	£0.18s.0d
	Glazier	£1.9s.8 ½ d
	Rob Arnould as per bill	£18.9s.0d
1800	Clothes for poor	£6.9s.2d
1801	Clothes for poor	£10.17s.0d
	Pease for the poor	£3.4s.0d



A photo of Chalk Hill Cottage, taken in the early 20th century.

The cottage can also be seen in the distance in the photo on the previous page.

**MILITARY REFERENCES:** (These are all connected with the Napoleonic Wars)

May 1792                      Gave Jas (or Jos) KEATE's wife when he was gone out in the militia 15/-

There is no James (Jas) Keates of the right age living in Aston Tirrold to be doing military service in 1792 but there is a Joseph Keates who was born in 1767 in Aston Tirrold making him aged 25 in 1792.

A marriage for him has been found at St Mary's Cholsey on 21 Oct 1789 between Joseph KEATE, Yeoman of Aston Tirrold and Jane DRUCE spinster of Cholsey. There is a baptism of Anne, daughter of Joseph KEATE and wife Jane in 1790. So, the 'wife' referred to above may be Jane, wife of Joseph KEATE. Although some Napoleonic service records are online, no location is given for where they came from - only the names and the military unit they served in. The only positive find comes for Jacob POPE of Aston – see entry for 1812.



1792                              Gave Thomas BROWN's child 1/6 per week (for 14 weeks) he being out in the Militia  
Thomas BROWN served for fourteen weeks in the militia and this payment would have gone to the child to enable him or her to live without the father's normal wages.

Thomas BROWN does not feature as a baptism in the village, but he did, however, marry here at St Michael's Church on 29 October 1788 to Martha CHIP (who had a sister called Ann CHIP living in the village.) Thomas and Martha BROWN had just one child, Sarah, born in 1789 and baptised in St Michael's on 31 May 1789.

Martha, his wife (born about 1768) is buried in St Michael's in 1841 aged 73. Thomas BROWN (born about 1764) is buried at St Michael's on 16 May 1850 aged 86. In 1792 Sarah BROWN would be aged about 3. In 1841 they both feature on the census for Church Street (now Aston Street) a few houses away from The Manor. Thomas is listed as an Agricultural Labourer.

It is interesting that from this parish relief book, no monetary amount seems to be given to Martha BROWN, the wife, just for the child Sarah.

1794                              Paid the parish officers of Cholsey by order from a J.P (Justice of the Peace) for maintenance of a militia man's family £15.9s.4d and again (same year) £9.6s.8p

This is an example of the Parish of Aston Tirrold paying a 'substitute' to another family in a neighbouring village who may have volunteered to serve in the militia instead of a man from Aston Tirrold. Hence the

maintenance of his family in Cholsey was paid for by Aston Tirrold.

When someone was conscripted, if they could not serve they had to pay for a substitute to serve for them. Where that individual could not afford the substitute fine, it seems the parish paid it for them out of the poor rate. (See APPENDIX 2: Notes on Militia and the paying of a substitute).

1795 To Mr John POTTENGER towards a man for the navy £6.18s.0d

We do not have any other information on this man. There was a Mary POTTINGER living in the village in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, but no John.

For a gun for the use of the parish 12 shillings

A most interesting entry. Who took control of the gun? Where was it kept? Was it to protect against invasion?

HAZELL + his family while he was out in the militia 12/-

There were a few Hazell or Hazel families living in Aston Tirrold and Blewbury. The only one who meets this description in terms of age must be James HAZELL who married Elizabeth HUGGILL in Blewbury in 1784. She was probably born about 1760 and not in Aston Tirrold. The local HAZELL family mostly seem to come from around the Compton or north Newbury area. He had 2 sons William (born 1788) and Matthew (born 1795), both born in Aston Tirrold.

1802 R. THORN expenses in endeavouring to get sailors 5/6

To the overseers of Eaton Hastings (a village near Faringdon) for the wife + child of William TURNER, substitute in the militia 55 weeks at 2/8

William TURNER and family. This is another example of the parish of Aston Tirrold paying a substitute to a man who lived in Easton Hastings for someone from Aston Tirrold who was for some reason unable to serve. As this cost is being born by the Parish Poor Rate, I can only conclude that the conscripted man from Aston Tirrold was ill or in some way unable to serve and a substitute, William TURNER was found.

1807 Substitute for John JARVIS in the militia £10.0s.0d

Paid again towards John JARVIS substitute £3.2s.0d

This must be John JARVIS born 1780 in Aston Tirrold to James and Mary JARVIS. He would have been about 27 at this time and has had to be substituted.

1811 Paid M. SAUNDER's of Basildon towards a substitute in the militia £9.0s.0d

1812 Benjamin POPE's family when he was a soldier 2 weeks at 7/6 per week

Benjamin POPE. The POPE family have been living for a very long time in Aston Tirrold and a POPE record is shown on the very first page of the baptism book for St Michael's, Aston Tirrold for the year 1607. They are also found regularly in the URC records. Benjamin POPE was born in 1782 to Thomas and Ann POPE. He married Elizabeth ALDER on 30 November 1806 in Blewbury and their first child, called Hannah, was born in 1812. His occupation was an agricultural labourer.

The same year (1812) Benjamin was called up to serve in the Militia. See also entry below for 1813 when he was called up again. Benjamin survived the war and went on to have 4 more children, Thomas (1815) James (1817) Sarah (1821) Jacob (1825). Benjamin POPE died in 1834 aged 52 and is buried in St Michael's Church.

His two sons James and Jacob also served in the Napoleonic Wars. Jacob was killed at the Battle of

Waterloo in 1815, while James survived and received the Waterloo Medal. His death is recorded in the parish register of St. Michael's Church, and refers to him as a 'veteran of Waterloo.'

It is a particularly interesting story, which I propose to write about at another time, as it does not relate directly to this poor relief study.

1812 Thomas HERBERT's family when he was a soldier 2 weeks at 9/5  $\frac{3}{4}$  (9 shillings + 5 pence + 3 farthings) per week

Thomas HERBERT was born in Aston Tirrold in 1785 to Richard and Elizabeth HERBERT. Thomas HERBERT married Elizabeth JONES in St Michael's Church on 17 April 1808. Their first child Hannah was baptised in St Michaels' Church on 10 July 1808. Thomas and Elizabeth had the following children, all born in Aston Tirrold: Henry (1810), Martha (1813), Richard (1815), William (1817), John (1819), Esther (1821), Thomas (1823), Charles (1825) and finally Isaac (1827).

Thomas senior died in 1832 aged just 46 leaving a wife with a large family of very young children. His occupation was shoemaker. I wonder how many of the shoes and boots that were repaired and are mentioned in these poor records Thomas HERBERT may have mended?

1813 To substitute in local militia £2.5s.6d  
Benjamin POPE's family when he was a soldier 16/- total  
See under 1812 above  
George BALL family when he was a soldier 12/6 total.

George BALL was born in Aston Tirrold in 1785 to John and Elizabeth BALL.

He married in 1811 in Blewbury to Ann STYLES. His occupation was farm labourer. They had their first child Charles, born in 1813 – the same year he was called up for the army.

George returned after serving in the army and had a number of children all born in Aston Tirrold: James (1816), Ann (1819), Jane (1821), Harriet (1824), George junior (1827), and Stephen (1832).

George BALL died in Aston Tirrold in 1865 aged 80.



St. Michael's churchyard

## MEDICAL REFERENCES:

1791 18 girdles to cure the itch  
Physic for 2 families  
Paid to Dr BREACH 5/6

Girdles to cure 'the itch': these products consisted of a girdle, which I presume could be worn by men or women, which was impregnated with a chemical medication solution to kill the mite by being in close continued contact with where the mites were under the skin. Having bought one, you could return it to have it re-medicated rather than buying a whole new one.

I think the local doctor Dr BREACH was prescribing exactly this product. Dr BREACH was known in the village as the local doctor, and lived in The Red House on Moreton Road.

1794: Paid Mr HAYES for smallpox bill £4.0s.0d. And, another bill £6.6s.0d

A regular unwanted 'visitor', smallpox was endemic in the population. Highly contagious, it killed on average 35% of those who caught it, and often leaving those who recovered with horrendous scarring. Edward JENNER is famously associated with introducing the vaccine into the UK, although there is good evidence that other countries such as China had already developed a similar vaccine based on the cowpox disease, which was shown to render those who had had cowpox immune to smallpox. Cowpox was a very mild disease.

There is some research showing that smallpox vaccines were rolled out in some English counties from around 1790, with the parish poor relief system used to pay for some of the vaccinations – see tables below. I could not find any on-line records showing where or how the vaccinations were introduced in Berkshire.

The entry for Dr Hayes in 1794 seems to indicate the parish poor relief was used to pay for a smallpox vaccination programme in the village. Or did it mean there was in fact a smallpox outbreak in the village and these were the fees for the doctor to treat some of the villagers, and paid for out of poor relief?

A look at the burial book for St Michael's Church, Aston Tirrold for 1794 shows 10 deaths, which was an average number in any one year. In Aston Tirrold there is one smallpox epidemic listed in 1741 where 20 people died that year and 9 of them have the word "smallpox" written beside the entry.

My conclusion is this was a vaccination programme. We do not know how many people were vaccinated or if it was just "the poor" or just children? Or everyone? But either way, the poor relief fund paid for it.

1799: Ointment for the itch

1801: To G MORTIMER, to pay a doctor for 26 weeks at 1/- per week £1.6s0d

The Cholsey doctor for J JARVIS 14/4

W JONES £1.11s.10d and again 5/-

Ann MORTIMER 2/-

We have come across the Mortimer family before in relation to Mortimer's boy (page 10).

Ann MORTIMER was baptised in St Michael's on 19 February 1764 daughter of William MORTIMER and his wife Mary. This Ann MORTIMER was therefore one of the legitimate children of William and Mary MORTIMER, and half-sister to the illegitimate child known as Mortimer's Boy and sharing the same father.

1804 Mr DEBRAY paid for attending J JARVIS + wife. £1.18s.6d

Edward Jenner



Paid for attending parish £4.4s.0d

This becomes a regular ½ yearly item, but Mr DEBRAY sends in bills for other attendances

1807	Mr BREACH's bill for care of M PARSON's neck	
	Mr DEBRAY for attending Aston Parish £4.4s.0d. His bill	£7.0s.6d
1809	Mr DEBRAY's name now spelt as DEHAYE	
1811	Mr BREACH for attending the poor ½ yearly £4.4s.0d, his bill	£12.12s.8d
1812	Mr BREACH for attending the poor ½ yearly, his bill	£1.8s.8d
1814	Mr BREACH for attending the poor ½ yearly £5.0.0d, his bill	£23.15s 0d

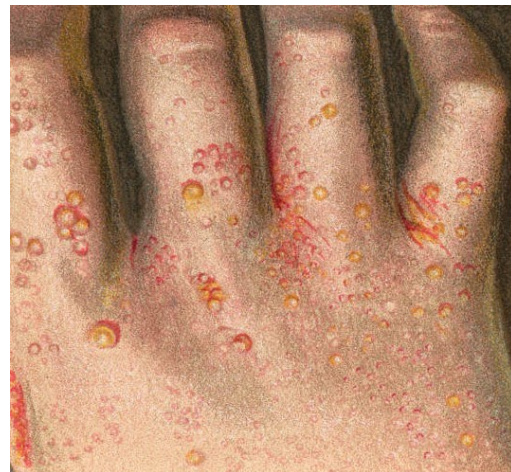
This seems to be a very advantageous use of the parish poor fund, allowing either those on parish relief or maybe more broadly, aid to anyone with medical needs in the parish to go and see a doctor once every 6 months.

The doctor (either Dr DEBRAY/DEHAYE or Dr BREACH) then put in his bill over and above the attendance fee, which I assume included giving them medicine.

1819 £5.0s.0d allowed A DIGGINS towards paying the doctors bill attending on his wife (he is in regular relief)

Aaron DIGGINS married Jemima PRINCE 13 August 1789 in Blewbury. In late June 1819, Jemima DIGGINS dies. On 27 June 1819, Jemima DIGGINS was buried in St Michael's aged 60.

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The itch mite (*Sarcoptes scabiei*) which caused scabies, commonly known as The Itch. It is a burrowing mite that gets under the skin and causes very itchy red patches and spots. It is highly contagious.

## INTERESTING ODDMENTS FROM THE ASTONS POOR BOOK:

1790 Rate paid by Thomas Fuller on the windmill  
1791 Rate no longer being paid on windmill, but Richard HERBERT now has a watermill

Interesting speculation as to where this windmill or watermill were? There is a Mill Acre shown on the 1808 Enclosure Map out towards the old Aston Common lands.

1800 Country rates £2.14s.3d per quarter for a year for 1 year only  
1800 Loss on a 100 +1/2 of rice seed sold to the poor at 1/2p per lb 7/-Loss on 12 bushells of pease 12/- ( Stephen's additional note: "These are the only "loses" mentioned in this book")  
1802 Brown paid to sweep the street 2d  
1802 Paid for the letter as came from Beenham 9d  
1807 3 gallons port wine for Mary CARTER when ill £2.11s.0d.  
1808 Her funeral (Stephen's additional note = "no wonder!" ) £1.8s.0d

There is no record for a Mary CARTER being buried in St Michael's or the URC church in 1807 or any other year. In fact there are no records for anyone called Carter in any village records for baptisms, marriages or death in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. She must have been resident in Aston Tirrold, to be eligible for the gallons of port wine paid for. Possibly her body was taken somewhere else nearby - there is a burial for a Mary Carter in early January 1808 in Brightwell. Assuming the funeral costs may have had to be paid up front, this might explain why the bill for it fell into 1807.

1810 Sparrows and vermin 12/3d  
1811 Expenses of marrying James BUSHELL £8.4s.0d

An interesting entry. James BUSHELL married on 23 January 1812 at St Michael's. In the register it shows he was from the parish of Bradfield. His bride was Ann PETHER from the parish Aston Tirrold, but she was not born here. It also notes that James BUSHELL was a minor (aged under 21) and married with the consent of his father. The witnesses were Richard FINCH and Thomas CURTIS, two notable village worthies. There are no baptisms or burials for anyone called BUSHELL in Aston Tirrold.

Why was the Parish paying for an out of village marriage? I could understand if the money was given to the bride for the wedding as she lived in Aston Tirrold, but why to James BUSHELL? Maybe there was a baby on the way? The only clue is that the marriage was by license, presumably because of the age of James BUSHELL. I suspect that was what the expense was for. Maybe they went to live in Bradfield after the marriage?

1811 Making out and carrying in the population list to Wallingford 4/6

The first census was done in 1801. 1811 was the second national censuses and was taken on 27<sup>th</sup> May.

There are no early surviving copies of this census for Aston Tirrold, but residents would have been asked what the occupation of the family was, rather than asking what the occupation for the head of the household was. Information in the census records varies across the UK, but commonly includes:

1. *Street plus number or name of house*
2. *Head of household (only the head of household's name was included)*
3. *Occupation of family (agriculture; trade, manufacturing or handicraft, or 'other')*
4. *Household members in the household (adults only)*

1812 Repairing Thomas CORDEROY's cart broken in the use of the parish. 1/6

1813 Repairing the stocks 5/-

Village oral testimony says the stocks used to be roughly where the war memorial now stands, a central public position in the middle of both villages and serving both villages.

1819 Benjamin POPE + James BENNETT, expenses taking to Abingdon on suspicion of sheep stealing

We have met Benjamin POPE before in the militia records. See entry for 1813. I cannot find any record of this court case or crime. By 1819 Benjamin POPE had a wife and several children.

James BENNETT was born in Aston Tirrold in 1792. He married Ann HERBERT on 16 February 1813 in St Michael's. James was a farm labourer. Their first child Mary Ann was baptised on 13 June 1813, followed by several other children including Charles baptised in 1818, Sarah in 1822, and Charlotte in 1824.

James BENNETT features in a riot in Aston Tirrold that took place on 23 November 1830 - part of a mass movement of agricultural workers called The Swing Riots, which were in protest at agricultural mechanisation, low wages and harsh working conditions. They had began with the destruction of threshing machines in the summer of 1830, and by early December had spread through the whole of southern England and East Anglia. Below are contemporary cartoons and a map showing areas affected by the riots.



The uprising in Aston Tirrold was led by three named ring leaders and supported by about sixty or so other men from surrounding villages, all demanding higher agricultural wages of 12/- per week (there is also a record that a threshing machine was deliberately damaged in Aston Upthorpe by 'a mob').

They were brought before a judge in Abingdon in January 1831. The witnesses to this specific event were Thomas FULLER, the younger, farmer of Aston Tirrold, who said that those indicted were behaving lawfully in the morning when he saw them around 8.00am but by the afternoon "were clamorous about their wages".

William POPE, described as a farm labourer, who did not join the mob also described the events of the day. The mob were accused of unlawful assembly and riot. Another witness was Charlotte SLADE, farmer's wife at whose house the rioters arrived in the afternoon demanding beer, which she refused to give them. Other witnesses were Thomas HERBERT chief constable of the village, and finally the curate (parson) of Aston Tirrold, Rev John CAMPBELL.

Charlotte SLADE's testimony impressed Judge Park when the rioters were brought before him at Abingdon. Below is part of the court report for January 1831:

'Even Judge Park eventually had his eyes opened "to the true perspective of the rhetorical language that

had assumed such terrifying importance" to himself and to his fellow judges sitting on other special commissions. During the trial of the remainder of the Berkshire men at Abingdon, he was impressed by the reaction of the mob to a display of firmness on the part of a Mrs. Charlotte Slade, wife of an Aston Tirrold farmer. When asked for beer she answered, "Not a drop!", and when asked why she refused to give it said, "I cannot give beer to encourage riot." When the leader of the mob, named Bennett, asked her if she would be afraid or daunted if her premises should be set on fire, she admitted that she would be, but added that she did not suppose that they intended any such thing. The result of this dialogue was that Bennett and his followers went home without beer, and without giving any further trouble."

James BENNETT (named in the above court case) farm labourer, and two other men named as Thomas BILLING and Benjamin BLAGROVE (neither of whom feature in any village records) were each sentenced to two months imprisonment with hard labour. The others were discharged and bound over to keep the peace.

In 1851 James BENNETT is still living in Aston Tirrold and working as a farm labourer.

A number of Berkshire men charged with riot and violence were transported to Botany Bay, Australia. No one from Aston Tirrold was transported.

Regular payments. These are noted as recurring payments throughout the book at various times.

"Gaol money" (sometimes) and "house of correction" money ½ yearly

A house of correction was a place set up within a county (several existed in around Berkshire) which housed vagabonds and vagrants moved on from parishes where they were not known and not wanted. In 1818 the nearest House of Correction was in Newbury and the nearest gaol was in Wallingford.

Constable's account: I do not know if during this time Aston Tirrold employed a constable. In the account of the riots in 1831, it named Thomas HERBERT as chief constable of Aston Tirrold. Assuming there was someone wholly or partly employed in this job during this time, then the parish poor relief funds were paying for his services.

Surveyor's account

Repairing the pound. The village pound was opposite the Chequers Inn (where the war memorial now stands) and later called Bagg's Piece or Bagg's Patch. It was used for a variety of things. The pound was used for housing stray animals, and also for the collection of the scrapings off the village roads, which consisted of good horse muck and soil. These were auctioned at The Chequers Pub in various lots about twice a year and normally bought by the local landowners.

Birdkeeping (sometimes) or gun or gun powder for the same.

I think this was paying for a boy to be employed in scaring birds away from the crops, or for using the gun for the same purpose. Nothing to do with shooting birds for sport or food.

Spinning wheels. For women to earn some money

Work on the road. For men to earn some money.

These were jobs or occupations given to those on poor relief to give them a sense of dignity and purpose, for which they were paid. The women earned some money from the results of their spinning, or used the yarn to knit woollen garments, either for themselves or to sell.

*HERE ENDS STEPHEN'S RESEARCH NOTES*

## APPENDIX One. Legal settlement and removal.

### Legal Settlement:

The qualifications by which persons were eligible for parish poor relief were broadly as follows:

- i) To have been born in the parish of legally settled parent.
- ii) To have lived there for 3 years.
- iii) Renting property worth more than £10 per annum in the parish or paying taxes on such a property.
- iv) Holding a Parish Office.
- v) Being hired by a legally settled inhabitant for a continuous period of 365 days. Most single labourers were hired from the end of Michaelmas week (late September) until the beginning of the next Michaelmas so avoiding the grant of legal settlement. This was an early form of fixed term contract. Most farm labourers therefore (unless born in the parish) only had right of tenure in their jobs for one year at a time. By the time you were married, it was deemed that you had proved your worth and gained experience, in which case longer hirings were possible, therefore changing your legal settlement status from temporary to legally settled. (A newly hired farm labourer, and any family, required notification from his employer to the overseers prior to his arrival).
- vi) Having served a full apprenticeship to a legally settled man or woman for the full 7 years.
- vii) Having previously been granted poor relief. This condition implied that you had previously been accepted as being legally settled and was usually only referred to in settlement examinations. Females changed their legal settlement status on marriage, adopting their husbands legal place of settlement. If a girl married a man in her own parish but he was of a different parish, but they continued to live in her parish. If her husband died she would automatically be removed to his place of legal settlement along with any issue from the marriage.

If you could not satisfy any of these requirements you could move into a new parish using a settlement certificate providing your home parish would issue one. This was a form of indemnity issued by your home parish stating that you and your family and any future issue belonged to the home parish, and they would take you all back at their expense if you became chargeable to the new parish. Because of the expense of removal, it would be unlikely your home parish would issue a certificate for a parish a long distance away. A settlement certificate was only valid if it bore the seals of the overseers of both parishes and that of the local Justices.

### Removal:

If you or your family became, or threatened to become reliant on parish relief and you could not satisfy the strict guidelines for legal settlement, then you were liable to be removed to the place of your last legal settlement. If you were a man, then you would be removed back to your old parish at their expense, but if no settlement certificate was in force, then a removal order was applied for from the local Justices of the Peace. This would usually involve an examination - before the local justice, overseers and other ratepayers - of where your legal place of settlement was, carried out. In uncertain cases others might have to give witness, such as parents, grandparents and siblings, and these examinations could run into many pages covering the full life story of the individual's family.

## APPENDIX Two: Notes on Militia and the paying of a 'substitute'.

The Militia Act of 1802 brought together a number of earlier Militia Acts passed during the French Revolutionary Wars (1794-1802). It provided for an 'Old Militia' with a total strength of 51,489 serving men in England and Wales (including the City of London, Cinque Ports, and the Stannaries), and allowed for a 'Supplementary Militia' of half as many again which could be raised with Parliamentary approval.

Each County's Lord Lieutenant would set the amount of militiamen to be raised from the various areas of their county dividing it by each hundred (a hundred was the division of a shire for military and judicial purposes under the common law). In feudal times 100 hides of land was believed to be sufficient to sustain one peasant family which was then consolidated into a larger area given the title of a hundred, which was an area enough to sustain 100 families of 100 hides each. The modern day equivalent of a hundred is roughly 64,000 acres, or one hundred square miles.

Under the 1802 Militia Act, reporting to the County Lord Lieutenant, the parish constables would draw up lists of all eligible men between 18 and 45 living in their parish. Men were divided into five classes:

1. Under 30, no children
2. Over 30, no children
3. All men, no living children under 14
4. All men, one child under 14
5. All other men

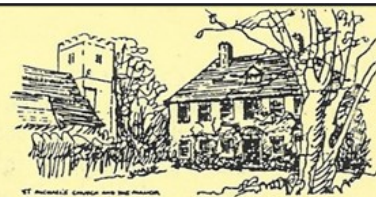
Men were to be drawn from the classes above in order from 1 down to 5. If a quota could be filled only from the first and second classes, the third, fourth and fifth were untouched. A class could be taken in its entirety if it was below the absolute quota, but if larger than the number required a ballot was to be used. Any man who was taken into service through this process was known as a 'principal', and was sworn in to serve as a private soldier for a term of five years, after which they were exempt until a fresh ballot was made, or they could volunteer for further service if they wished.

Instead of serving themselves they could arrange to provide a 'personal substitute' who was willing to serve in their stead - this could be a volunteer already on the local ballot, or someone from elsewhere in the county. Parishes could also arrange to provide parochial substitutes in lieu of their quota of men, and were allowed to levy a parish rate in order to pay for these substitutes. Finally, any balloted man could pay a fine of £10 and avoid service, though he would be liable to be balloted again after five years. The fines were used to hire substitutes and any surplus would go to regimental funds.

A wide range of men were exempt - most obviously, officers and men of the army, navy and marines, but also peers, clergymen, teachers, university students, constables, sailors, apprentices, or men working in royal arsenals or dockyards. A poor man (defined as one with assets of less than £100) with more than one legitimate child was exempt, as was any poor man physically unfit for service, or any man measuring less than 5'4" tall. A man worth more than £100 but unfit for service was still liable to pay his fine or provide a substitute. Quakers were not allowed to avoid service through paying a fine but were required to find a substitute in lieu of service. If they did not do so, the county was empowered to hire one on his behalf and if necessary, seize his property to pay for it.

If a man died, or was discharged as unfit, this would result in a second ballot (in practice, probably of his local parish) to find a replacement. Should the county fail to provide enough men, it would be fined £10 per head of the annual deficit. This money was to be raised locally and could be used to hire substitutes, but if this failed to achieve the desired result, it was paid to the Treasury.

## Some Village Memories



*This concludes Gilbert Corderoy's memories, recorded and transcribed by Jenny Worthington. The first part was published in our April 1995 issue.*

Mr Cross (known as F.J.K. Cross) who made his fortune in the cotton industry in Manchester and came to The Manor in 1900, built Carrimers Farm, the two cottages on Chalk Hill, two at Sheepphouse, new buildings at Lower Hill Barn and what is now Races Farm. He also owned quite a lot of cottages in Aston Tirrold. He employed a foreman, a gamekeeper and about 15 men, working first with horses and then with tractors. Before the days of combine harvesters, cornricks were built in the fields. A threshing machine was taken in the winter from field to field with Mr Clargo and Jo Hearne doing the threshing. A wire fence was put around each rick to confine the rats and Mr Clargo's dog, Queenie, was an expert rat catcher. Farm workers were given 2d a tail for rats and Dave King used to catch "no end" at Carrimers. When the fields were cut with the binders, there were a lot of rabbits to catch. The fields were much smaller than today, with many more hedges and trees round them, but one of the larger fields would yield 50 rabbits. Mr Cross had several pheasant shoots, Gilbert was a beater and the shooting party used to lunch at Lower Hill Barn.

Sheep and cattle were driven to market along the road to Wallingford by George Rich, stockman at Carrimers. Swedes, turnips and kale were grown for fodder and hand-hoed. A hurdle-maker came at intervals to make sheep hurdles from withies cut from pollarded willows in the meadows. There was a cherry orchard to the east of Aston Street, but the best cherries grew where Berrycroft is now. The cherries were auctioned in The Boot whilst they still hung on the trees, and strangers came to pick them.

There was no mains water in the villages and most houses had their own wells. Four houses shared a well on Chalk Hill and several houses shared one in the Moreton Road. Sometimes, in a dry summer, Gilbert would have to dig the wells three feet deeper. There was a well and a pump at the school. The larger houses had a big tank in the roof and one of the men pumped water up each morning. There was a wind pump at Carrimers. The school and most of the houses had privies in the garden usually with simple buckets, but a few had earth closets which were dug out about once a year. Some semi-detached houses had semi-detached closets where neighbours could have a friendly chat over the wooden partition!

There used to be a fire engine in a barn behind 9 Aston Street where Tom Powell lived. It was a wooden horsedrawn cart with water pumped by hand, but in Gilbert's time this was no longer used. He remembers three large fires: the boxes and thatched barns burned down at Pope's; the farm buildings at Copse Stile where the Dutch barn stands today; and the cricket pavilion in 1968, where the children's playground is now, which had recently had its thatch replaced by tiles.

There were two carriers to Wallingford, Mr Fry and Mr Pepol, who would take almost anything on their carts. You could pay a shilling for a ride into town. People walked to Cholsey to catch the train and many people had bicycles. Jonathan Pope of Rose Cottage would take people to Wallingford in a horse and trap. Building materials were sent by horse and cart from Phillips in Crowmarsh (now Jewsons). Some materials came by steam traction engine and trailer from Ridleys in Reading. Sand and gravel were obtained locally from the Moreton Road, now the Old Pits. The use of cob, wattle and daub and hard chalk rock as local building materials had already ended when Gilbert started work.

All the big houses had servants: The Manor had a chauffeur and odd-job man, two parlourmaids, a cook, a kitchenmaid and about six gardeners; Blewburton Hall had about five in the house; Copse Stile and Orchard House had about three in the house.

Major Morris and his American-born wife lived at Blewburton Hall. Between 1920 and 1930 his wife had all the lawns covered with chicken houses, which Gilbert helped to build. She had Light Sussex poultry and she went to all the big shows with her champion cockerel. Major Morris had a racing stable and his brother built Orchard House in the twenties. Colonel Winter lived at Finches and started a Scout troop. The Scout hut was an old railway carriage situated where The Close is now. Dr Moon lived in Copse Stile, which was rented from Mr Cross and travelled every day to Harley Street. Dr Langmore lived in The Red House and had a daily surgery in Herbert's Cottage and later on at The Red House. He would put wooden splints on a broken limb and had a big jar of 'cure-all' medicine which was dished out to everyone for 'flu. Harold Slade owned Lower Farm (also called Ham Farm and now Upton Farm). Leonard Slade farmed Thorpe Farm, the Slades having lived here since 1521.

Some of the families were very large; the Rays and Blakes each had ten children. Les and Kitchy Ray still live in the village. More than one family lived in Pope's, the Blakes having lived there at one time.

Other Astons History Group publications:

- \* Aston Tirrold and Upthorpe: a History, by Lucy Fuller. (1921). A fascinating record of village life, given as a talk to the Astons Women's Institute. An Astons History Group reprint. 2005.
- \* Sir John Leigh Hoskyns: Rector of St. Michael's Church Aston Tirrold 1846 to 1911, by Vivien Biggs. *The life of a Victorian rector whose 60 year tenure saw many changes in village life.* 2006.
- \* Sir John Leigh Hoskyns' Diary of a village. Extracts, selected by Vivien Biggs. 2000.
- \* The Stockwell Players, by Robin Sewell. A drama group who performed outdoor productions for nearly thirty years, with early appearances by Prunella Scales and Alan Bates. Fore-runner of the Blewbury Players. 2000.
- \* Wee Joe: From Galloway to Flanders Fields. 2018.
- \* Astons Fallen Soldiers. *Lives of the Astons soldiers who lost their lives during WW1*
- \* *. 2018.*
- \* The Astons Home Front: the Role of Women during WW1, by Jancis Smith. 2018.
- \* A History of the Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe War Memorial: 1921-2021. 2021.
- \* An Astons Journal: The 'diary' of Stephen Elliott and Tom Powell: 1885 to 1984. , transcribed and annotated by Judy Barradell-Smith. Compiled and collated by Jancis Smith. 2019.
- \* The Astons Poor Relief Book, 1788-1821. A partial transcript, with research and annotation by Stephen Whitwell and Judy Barradell-Smith. 2023.

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