

**Title**  
**Date**

**The Poor of Scriven and the Workhouse**  
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In the mid-seventeenth century large parishes like Knaresborough were sub-divided into Townships to make the workload of the Overseers more manageable. Knaresborough was divided into 5 townships – Knaresborough town, Bilton with Harrogate, Scriven with Tentergate, Arkendale and Brearton with Ockany. Most documents concerning the poor of Scriven are deposited with North Yorkshire Archives at Northallerton. The earliest are indemnity bonds and settlement certificates from the end of the 1600s onwards. Overseers' account books and minute books recording meetings and correspondence from the first half of the nineteenth century also survive. The archive is for the whole township which covered the Tentergate and Bond End side of Knaresborough as well as the village of Scriven and it is not always possible to identify just where in the township someone lived. The record is by no means complete. Nevertheless it does allow a glimpse of how the poor of Scriven lived. What follows is a look at the role of the Overseers of the Poor and the work they did in Scriven.

### **The Overseers**

The office of Overseer of the Poor, elected by the parish vestry and unpaid, was created in 1572 and would continue until the mid-nineteenth century. The Overseers were in charge of a system of relief which became ever more complicated and demanding. The 1597 Act had laid down what the parish – and hence the Overseers - would be responsible for. A local Poor Rate would be set. 'Houses of dwelling' could be provided for the impotent poor. (Few of these were set up at this early date.) Able-bodied people were to be set to work and provided with materials for this. Children were also to work and be apprenticed. The elderly and infirm were to be given help. Relief was in cash or in kind – food, clothing, fuel, rent. And in 1662 they had to determine where a person should be considered 'settled'.

Overseers of the Poor also took on other tasks for the Township. They were responsible for taking the census from 1801 to 1831. They provided for the families of militia serving away from home in the early eighteenth century. They probably organised the distribution of charity and managed the land allotted to Scriven poor. The administration of this system was cumbersome with letters to and fro, visits to other parishes to chase debts or deal with settlement issues. It is worth noting that the Overseers were unpaid. The only paid officer was the Workhouse Master who did also act as Assistant Overseer and do some of this work.

### **The Poor Rate**

Until the Reformation the poor had been looked after by a combination of help from the parish and from monasteries and other religious institutions. Once Henry VIII began his reforms and the monasteries were abolished it was left to the parish to

support the poor. However many things a parish had relied on for income were prohibited by the reforms. Finding the means to pay for the poor became an issue. Early on, from 1536, voluntary alms were to be collected by the parish to pay for the poor. Not surprisingly this did not raise sufficient money and in 1563 householders were required to pay compulsory contributions. Knaresborough seems to have resisted a set poor rate. The session rolls of 1597-8 – 1602 record the citizens of Knaresborough making a petition that 'the poore may be suffered to beg and aske relief abroad throughout the parish.' The rationale for this seems to have been that 'many are able to give release which are not able to give money'. Their petition was granted, although at some point they had to make the change and property was valued and a Poor Rate set.

The Poor Rate was charged, like our old rating system, according to the value of property. It was collected quarterly and people would be taken to court if they refused to pay. Valuations were made from time to time and it was the job of the Vestry and Overseers to arrange for the valuation, collect the rates and deal with any complaints and non-payers. The earliest records of a Poor Rate being collected in Knaresborough are from the mid 1700s.

Organising the valuation and collecting the money was an onerous task; one which took the Overseers many months to accomplish when a new valuation was made in 1834. It cost the Township £50 for a survey map, though the Vestry decided not to pay an extra £5 for vellum. A further 3d in the pound was paid to the surveyor for the valuation of the properties.

### **Charities**

A small amount of income separate from the poor Rate was available from charities. These originate mostly in the 1600s. Three of these were combined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the income divided between the Knaresborough Townships – Scriven receiving 2/9ths. Anthony Acham had left income from land in his will of 1638, William Carter similarly gave income from land in 1688 and Christopher Yeates left £100 in 1807. All intended the proceeds to be used to provide bread for the poor. The annual income in 1827 was £16.9.10. The churchwardens bought bread – 190 twopenny loaves each month - with this and distributed it on the last Sunday in every month. If there was a shortfall in the money the difference was made up from the church rates.

In 1640 Christopher Lewis of Whixley had left the income of land in Thorp Underwood to be used for the relief of Scriven poor and doled out just before Christmas and Easter. Distribution was at the discretion of the Slingsbys. Income in 1834 was £1.0.0 p.a.

In 1729 William Roundell left income from land in Farnham to be used half for Scriven and half for Bilton with Harrogate. The owner of the estate, churchwardens and overseers were to distribute the income. In 1834 this was £4.0.0 p.a. These charities together with others from the Knaresborough area were amalgamated in 1964.

The Churchwardens also had income from a piece of land on Belmont. This was lot 130 allocated to the Overseers of the Poor in the enclosures of 1775 and for which they paid £3.3.6. It yielded £2.0.0 p.a.

## **Settlement**

The 1597 Act for the Relief of the Poor, revised in 1601, set out who was to be helped. The 1662 The Act of Settlement defined where a person was considered to be settled and therefore who should be responsible for them if they needed relief.

A stranger in a parish could be forcibly removed if he did not have work or rent a house worth more than £10 a year. Once he had worked in the new parish for more than a year he could be considered settled there. Holding a parish office or completing an apprenticeship also gave him settled status. Women changed their place of settlement to that of their husband on marriage.

From 1662 Indemnification bonds were issued stipulating who would be responsible should the newcomer need relief. Guarantors were required and would have to pay a bond of £40, a considerable sum in the late seventeenth century, if the incomer became chargeable or troublesome. Begging was forbidden.

By 1691 registers of parishioners receiving relief had to be kept and in 1697 Indemnification Bonds were replaced by Certificates of Settlement. People moving to a new parish had to be supported by their original parish if they claimed relief. A parish would only be required to look after its own.

Some Indemnity Bonds and Settlement Certificates survive for people coming into the village. Numbers are small. It seems most likely that people, mostly from neighbouring villages – Burton Leonard, Bilton, Killinghall etc., moved to find work. At the same time records of people with a Settlement Certificate moving from Scriven with Tentergate to Knaresborough Township show a fair number going there, especially at the very end of the 17<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century – 21 in total between 1698 and 1717. Perhaps this was a time when the linen trade was buoyant and labour in demand.

If relief was needed costs were involved so naturally there were arguments about which parish would pay. There was a process of appeal if you were threatened with removal to your original parish. If this failed a removal order followed. Documents about this process exist for a later period.

We can get a glimpse of some people moving into the Township from the records. Two families give contrasting pictures.

An Indemnification Bond has survived for a William Briggs dated 1693/4. He had married a village girl, Hannah, but came from Great Ouseburn, so needed an Indemnity Bond in case he needed Poor Relief. One of the guarantors was Thomas Briggs, a blacksmith – possibly his brother or uncle. ( A baptism for William, son of Robert Briggs is recorded at Great Ouseburn for 1659.) Only 3 years later the name of William Briggs crops up as one of the Overseers of the Poor. We cannot be sure it is the same person, but it seems likely. He died in 1708 and his widow Hannah was appointed to administer his estate. The inventory shows that he had been working as

a blacksmith and also had a smallholding growing corn and hay. The house was fairly substantial for the time with a kitchen, parlour, cellar, bedchamber, shop and yard. He had prospered.

A sadder fate seems to have befallen the Allison family who moved from Thorner in about 1813. Robert was a weaver. Perhaps he became sick and had to ask for Relief but he was not settled. Scriven Overseers gave the family 6 shillings emergency relief in January 1814, but took proceedings in the magistrates' court for a Removal Order to be issued and the family was obliged to move back to Thorner. The Township had to pay significant costs to achieve this. 5 shillings for the court order, 11/6 for a carriage to Thorner and another 10/6 for the hire of a horse and cart – for their goods and chattels presumably. And someone had to be paid 9 shillings to finish Robert's piece of cloth.

### **Children**

Orphans and illegitimate children were to be supported and the Overseers required any putative father to enter into a contract to pay for the child's keep – a Bastardy Order. A weekly contribution was determined. The amount varies, so it was probably fixed according to means. The mother was paid the allowance by the Overseers weekly. For example, in 1785 Christopher Hopwood was required to pay the Churchwardens and Overseers to the Poor 1/6 weekly and also 20 shillings towards defraying the costs of maintaining Elizabeth Hall during her month of lying in. Elizabeth was to pay sixpence a week. This was for as long as the child remained chargeable.

It is probable that some orphaned children were fostered. We have a record in St John's burial register for 1714 for Joseph Ashton, a 'poor child at William Whitfield's'. It seems likely that he was an orphan, fostered out, or perhaps a child who had been apprenticed.

Schooling was paid for and after the National School opened in 1814 children from the Workhouse were sent there.

Children who were the responsibility of the Township were apprenticed out as soon as they were old enough to earn their own living – often as young as 7. In 1709 Robert Lightfoot, 'a poor child of 7' was apprenticed to William Lightfoot until he was 24.

The name of William Robinson crops up many times in the record and his history shows something of how a child who was dependent on the Township would be treated. His mother was Jane Robinson and there are bastardy certificates relating to two of her children – William and his older sister Betty. Betty was born and baptised in 1812; William in 1816. Jane does not claim bastardy money for William until 1820 so we can assume something happened at that time which meant that she was no longer able to support him. Then the father is named as Joseph Thackray of Bilton, an innkeeper. He had to pay arrears of £1.3.6d towards the costs of Jane's lying in and maintenance to 1820, and 2/6d a week from then for as long as William was chargeable on the Township. Should Jane not look after the child herself she would

have to pay a third of this. When William was 10 there is a note that he was provided with a set of new clothes to go to Brearton. This is likely to have been to see a potential employer. Things must not have worked out because there is a certificate a year later apprenticing him to a tailor, Richard Mate in Knaresborough. Sadly no further evidence has been found to see how well he fared in adult life.

### **The elderly and infirm**

Most people needing relief were looked after in their homes. A weekly allowance was given, topped up by one off payments when there was an unusual need. Pension lists exist for much of the 1800s and show that the Township was supporting anything up to 40 people with weekly amounts ranging from 6 pence to 6 shillings a week. Many of these pensioners were elderly but the list also included widowed and single mothers and people with chronic illness or disability. The Pension List also includes people living outside the Township for whom the Township remained liable. They could be up the road in Knaresborough or as far afield as Derby and Birmingham. Letters had to be written, money sent – by postal order from the mid 1800s – and checks made as to who was liable for the cost.

When John Firth claimed from both Scriven and York for the same period, the Scriven Overseers made it clear that York had been taken in as he was already receiving money from Scriven. However, as they thought he really was sick on this occasion they agreed to continue to pay.

### **Relief in kind**

Requests for one-off payments for specific items, or for an increase in the weekly allowance could be made to a monthly meeting of the Overseers. Requests varied from second-hand shoes to funeral expenses; from wood and chaff for a child's bed to schooling.

No reason is given in the record for allowing a request or not. George Barf applied for 'Cotton for 2 Shirts and a good Old Coat little worse for wear.' This was allowed. Two months later Elizabeth Arcough applied for 4 shillings to remunerate her for help given to Widow Bales when her husband died. This was not allowed.

Some of the decisions seem to cover more than was absolutely necessary. There are funerals when 'crape' is paid for and bread, cheese and ale for the wake.

Doctors' bills are paid. Doctor Crowther charged 5 shillings for 'the cure of Martin Curry's ankle'.

Cash help was given when people were ill or out of work. For example to Jonathan Leedham when he was lame and his wife sick, or to Absalom Bramley 'being out of work'.

Rents were paid, usually half yearly for regular pensioners. Rent was also paid for some people who do not appear on the pensioners' list and must have been able to

earn enough for living costs, but not enough to cover rent as well. Rent could be paid as a short term support and sometimes help with just part of the rent was given.

### **The Workhouse**

Concern about the costs of looking after the poor is nothing new. By the early eighteenth century alternatives were being considered and it was thought a Workhouse would prove a more economical way of providing relief. They became more common after 1723 when the Workhouse Test was established. This allowed a parish to deny out-relief and only help if the claimant was in the workhouse. It was argued that this would deter all but the genuinely needy. Even so it was always a minority of Scriven's poor who were accommodated in the Workhouse.

At some point in the 1700s Scriven opened a Workhouse in a rented village house. The first evidence of this comes in the 1776-7 Gilbert Survey (Parliamentary Survey of poor relief expenditure in England and Wales including Abstract of Returns made by the Overseers of the Poor). Scriven with Tentergate Workhouse is listed as having 8 places.

We do not have any records to show just when or why Scriven opened a Workhouse. It was part of the same parish as Knaresborough Township which had set up a Workhouse in 1737 for 'maintaining, lodging, and employing the poor of the township, as shall be objects of charity; and for the education of the orphans, and providing a comfortable manner for the old and decrepit of the township and borough.' It seems likely Scriven followed suit.

By 1795 the rented house had become inadequate and it was replaced by extending what had been a school house on the village green. Money to pay for the building was borrowed and the bond to repay John Calverley £130 at £20 a year for the building has survived. This is the earliest document found relating to the Scriven workhouse. Over time the building was modified, 'conveniences' built and more ground taken over to extend the yard. Rooms were divided and accommodation made more comfortable for the Master. The building was whitewashed whether inside or out is unclear, and there were coal fires. There is a note of parts of the cobbled floor still being there in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The new house could accommodate about 20 people. With larger premises Scriven was now able to take people from neighbouring parishes. From 1808 to 1823 Scriven entered into agreements to take the poor from 6 neighbouring parishes: Copgrove, Goldsborough, Burton Leonard, Stainley with Cayton, Allerton Mauleverer, Whixley and Arkendale. These parishes paid a rent of £3 a year to the Scriven Overseers. A daily rate on top of this was charged for people resident in The Workhouse. Allerton paid a shilling a day for a man and a woman in 1827.

### **The Master**

In charge was the master. He was paid an annual salary of £30 all found. This must have been good salary in the first half of the nineteenth century. The master also acted as Assistant Overseer and could augment his salary by a few shillings a month from commission for collecting rents and bastardy money and attending to court business when people without settlement were ordered to leave the Township. An onerous job, masters seem to have changed fairly frequently. On one occasion in 1832 improvements to the Master's accommodation were approved, possibly to make the post more attractive. By the mid 1800s the post was advertised in the Leeds Mercury. A married man without children was preferred. He was appointed by an election after candidates presented themselves to a meeting of the Vestry and ratepayers. Meetings were sometimes held at Mrs Clapton's, The Royal Oak but in 1844 it was in the Vestry. To go by the numbers the room must have been packed. The election seems to have been a serious matter, and one where a little gerrymandering was in order to get your man in. The initial count was 78 for a Mr and Mrs Heptonstall and 74 for Mr and Mrs Pratt. This was challenged and the votes scrutinised. After this the numbers were reduced to 54 for the Heptonstalls and 48 for the Pratts. Sadly the Heptonstalls lasted no longer than May 1846 when John Heptonstall was sacked and ordered out of the Workhouse. The record does not show what he had done to deserve this.

### **Who were the residents?**

Old age, destitution, losing the family's breadwinner, being orphaned, disability and mental illness all seem to have been reasons people were admitted to the Workhouse. The 1841 census shows 11 inmates and the 1851 census shows 20. In 1851 the three adult men are described as linen weavers. There are 7 children without a parent and a further 3 born in Hull with their mother who was born in Ferrensby. It looks as though their father died and they were removed from Hull when they became a charge on the town. Ferrensby had an arrangement for their poor to be accommodated in the Scriven Workhouse.

Individuals could apply to go into the Workhouse. The reason why the Overseers allowed Thomas Wilton's request for his son to be admitted in 1849 is not stated. The family must have fallen on hard times and for some reason been unable to provide for the child.

Sometimes it seems that people were obliged to enter the Workhouse as the cheaper option for the Township. Soon after her husband's death in 1846 Widow Bates applied for nine shillings a week pension for herself and her 6 children. This was not allowed and she and her dependent children were taken into the house. Not all 6 children were admitted, so presumably those old enough to fend for themselves had to do just that.

Once in the House residents needed permission to leave. In 1848 Ellen Sinclair applied for 2 shillings a week and 'a trifle to go to Leeds'. She was ordered to remain in the House. Earlier in 1846 John Motson had been allowed to leave to seek

employment and Sarah Johnson had been granted half a crown a week to look after her mother who was until then in the Workhouse.

The same names crop up as residents in the Workhouse and at other times as receiving outdoor relief. For example, in December 1822 Robert Ledgway, his wife and 4 children were admitted. The children were given shoes. While the family was in the Workhouse Robert worked and regularly earned 17 shillings a month. They stayed in the Workhouse for over a year. In later years Robert received occasional outdoor relief and then for a time in the late 20s was receiving a regular amount on the pension list.

### **What work did they do?**

We do not know what kind of work Robert Ledgway did but able bodied people in the Workhouse were required to do whatever work was available. Earnings went direct to the Overseers and in 1848 the going rate was sixpence a day for women and fourpence for lads – lesser lads earned only threepence.

What kind of work? Earnings are recorded for gathering stones and clearing gorse. Thomas Wise was provided with 'sledging mittens' in 1823, presumably so that heavy work could be done in the winter months.

It is clear that some of the work provided in the Workhouse was weaving both cotton and linen and we have records that several inmates were weavers. There are records of flour as a dressing for weaves, grease and alum being bought. Cotton and linen 'webs' were also bought.

They must have kept a pig or two. Pigs are bought and sold, payments made to have them killed, straw bought in and manure sold. Perhaps the meat provided food for the inmates.

It is likely that the women worked in the house and did the washing and baking. (This happened in the Knaresborough Workhouse.) Flour and yeast are regularly bought though the bread went out to a baker for baking. There are occasional notes of payment for 'mangling'. Probably a woman had to be hired if there was no inmate available or able to do the washing.

### **What did they eat?**

Regular rations were bread, potatoes and porridge. The bread in the early 1800s was made from maslin flour, a mixture of wheat and rye, as well as wheat alone. Maslin was cheaper. Milk and butter were bought, though at times the amount of butter seems sufficient only for the master. Beef, beast heads and occasionally mutton were bought, and this may have been supplemented by bacon from their own pigs. Accounts for the month of July 1822 give an idea of the diet. Over 100 pounds of beef at 4d a pound are paid for. This was to feed 11 residents and the Master and his wife. 2 pecks of potatoes at 6d a peck and 7 at 3d a peck are bought and 6 bushels of corn. However, only 5 cabbages. (At other times seeds are noted so they may have grown some vegetables. No fruit appears in the accounts.) The

milk and butter for the month cost £1.7.3d. out of a total expenditure for the month of £6.13.5d.

### **What happened when they were ill?**

There are many notes of accounts from the doctor being settled. The winter of 1846 seems to have seen several folk ill. The doctor's bill was for £9..8..6.(The master's salary was £2..10..0 a month.) Stomach ailments seem to have been the problem. Among the medicines bought are 'Spanish jus', brandy, and 'ruebab and magnesia' . As one might expect at this period, leeches were used. They cost 6 pence.

No doubt there were also doctor's bills for people on outdoor relief, but in 1834 it was decided that 'henceforth the Overseers will not be responsible to the Surgeon of the Township for attending any Woman in their confinement except in the Workhouse.' Perhaps an example of the philosophy that only those with real need would ask for the help.

### **Were there any comforts for inmates?**

Shoes and clothing are regular expenses. Cloth was bought and made up by paying a tailor. It seems each resident got clothing made for them individually and there was no uniform. December 1822 saw Margaret Wise getting Broad Blue linen and printed cotton. Martha Auman got print and flannel.

When sick there were sometimes comforts. Tea sugar and coffee for Martha Auman in 1823, and some tobacco for George Waite. The 14 gills of ale, bread and tea 'when ill' may have been for the master. Marshmallows were bought in 1846, though again we don't know who for.

Christmas does seem to have been celebrated. Several inmates got new clothes at that time and the accounts for 1822 list cheese, raisins and seeds so they had some sort of Christmas feast.

### **The end of the Workhouse in Scriven.**

The workhouse regime was falling into disrepute by the early years of the nineteenth century. There was public resentment about the poor rate which people were required to pay, the growing numbers on relief and the feeling that existing workhouses were far too comfortable. Southwell had built a large new institution in 1824 and this was held to be a model for the new Union system introduced across the whole nation in 1834. A much harsher regime of segregation, restricted rations and work was introduced to deter all but the most needy from seeking help. Parishes were to form Unions sharing a larger institution – theoretically more economical to run. Locally this was resisted and the Knaresborough Union, which included Scriven, was not formed until 1854. Scriven Workhouse closed in July 1854. Knaresborough and Bilton provided accommodation until the new large Union Workhouse opened in Knaresborough 1858. Scriven Township sold its house to Sir Charles Slingsby in 1856 for £105 – less than it had cost to build 60 years previously – and the proceeds

went towards the poor rates . Sir Charles demolished the property with the blessing of the Poor Board.

### **After the Knaresborough Union.**

People in Scriven who needed of relief were now the responsibility of the Knaresborough Board of Guardians. Numbers receiving both indoor relief – now in the new Knaresborough Workhouse – and outdoor relief in their own home continued much the same. The number of Scriven residents in the Workhouse in 1865 was just 6.

People were accommodated on the Knaresborough site into the 1930s. Oral histories of life in Scriven in the twentieth century record memories of the Knaresborough Workhouse. Milk from Clapham's farm was delivered there, first by pony and trap, and later by van. The brother of another Scriven resident used to visit her in the village so many nights a week, bringing a bit of washing for her to do, and then going on to the pub before going back to the Workhouse.

### **Sources.**

North Yorkshire Archives at Northallerton hold the main archive for Scriven Township.

Other information from:

A History of the County of Yorkshire Vol III. University of London.

A History of Knaresborough Calvert

A History of Harrogate and Knaresborough. B Jennings

[www.workhouses.org](http://www.workhouses.org)