

**NORTHAMPTON MERCURY – 12<sup>th</sup> April 1834**

Extracts from an 'examination' of the changes in the personal conditions and expectations of labourers carried out by Mr. Whateley and Mr. Chadwick.

A Matter of contract between the master and the workman, but a right in the one and a tax on the other; and by removing the motives for exertion, the labourer was rendered by this mischievous system, as far as was possible, totally unworthy of this hire. The moral and intellectual character of the good old English labourer (who in former time had boasted with honest pride that he never was beholden to a parish office) was and of self-restraint, vanished; and since a family was sure passport to a parish allowance, it is not to be wondered at that the most improvident marriages were the consequence of this most pernicious and most demoralising system. Indeed, we have seen three generations of pauper (the father, the son, and the grandson), with their respective families at their heels, trooping to the overseer every Saturday for their weekly allowances; boys and girls marrying without having provided a bed to sleep upon or a roof to cover them; the parish was to provide every thing. The most wretched hovels were converted into houses, the rents of which were charged to the parish account. In this village a carpenter's work-shed has been divided into four tenements, for which the parish was charged five pounds a year a piece”

The following extracts from the examination of Mr. Whateley, and from Mr. Chadwick's report, show the subsequent condition of the parish.

“Is it observed that the personal that the personal condition of the labourers has in any respect changed since the change of system of administering the poor rates? – Decidedly, A labourer, formerly a pauper, came to the vestry not long since, to make inquiries requesting a house, in order to rent; when he had retired, one of the farmers exclaimed how neatly he was dressed, and how good his coat was; to which I answered “I can explain the reason of the

change; it is, that there is no longer a bonus offered by the vestry for rags and dirt. You all remember when ragged clothes were kept by the poor for the express purpose of coming to the vestry in them; whereas the articles of clothing which we sell to the poor at prime cost, have every year, since the establishment of a select vestry, been required to be of an improved quality.”

“Do you mean to state that they purchase more expensive articles? – I do; the blankets I send for from Witney are required to be larger and of a better quality; and so of all other articles.

“Do the labourers care to acknowledge to you that they wish to have the articles they purchase of a better quality? – Yes; and I find them less jealous of acknowledging their real condition than formerly; they now rather value themselves upon their respectability, than, as formerly, attempt to impose and extort money by pretended destitution.

“Is their food better or worse than formerly? – I think better. The labourers have a meal of meat once a day, and there is hardly a cottage that has not a supply of bacon on the rack.

“Has their general moral conduct improved, so far as you, as a minister, have observed? – It decidedly has; and I state this as a magistrate as well as a minister”.

Mr. Chadwick mentions that Mr. Russell, the magistrate of Swallow field, stated –

“That in riding through Cookham, he was so much struck with the appearance of comfort observable in the person and residences of some of the labouring classes of that village, that he was led to make inquiries into the cause. The answers he received determined him to exert his influence to procure a similar change of systems in Swallow field.

“I visited says Mr. Chadwick, “a large proportion of the cottages in the village of Cookham, and some in Cookham Dean. Their internal cleanliness and comfort certainly corresponded with the condition of the exteriors, which had attracted the attention of Mr. Russell. In company with Mr. Whateley, I visited several of the residences of the labourers at their dinner-time, and I observed that in every instance meat formed part of the cleanly manner. One cottage in the village of Cookham, and the wife

and family of the cottager, were most repulsively filthy and wretched in their appearance; and it was somewhat singular that this family was a pauper family, the head of which received an allowance in aid of his wages from an adjacent parish.

“I noticed some very trim hedges and ornaments in the gardens of the labourers, and it was stated to me that nothing of that sort had been seen in those places before the parishes had been dispauperised. Mr. Knapp, the assistant overseer, stated that the labourers were no longer afraid of having a good garden, with vegetable and fruit in it, they were no longer “afraid of having a pig, and no longer afraid of being tidy.” Before the changes took place he had been in public houses, and had seen pauper drunk there, and heard them declare in the presence of the rate-payers, that they (the paupers) had had more strong drink than the rate-payers had and would have it, and that the rate-payers could not help themselves.

“During the agricultural riots there was no fire, no riots, no threatening letters in the parish. In the midst of a district which was peculiarly disturbed, Cookham and White Waltham, where a similar system of poor-law administration was adopted, entirely escaped, although in Cookham there are several thrashing-machines, and the only paper mill had, at the time of the riots, been newly fitted with machinery.

“At the time of my visit the deposits in the savings bank from the parishioners of Cookham amounted to about £7,000. A considerable number of the present contributors had been paupers changeable to the parish at the time of the old system being discontinued. Mr. Sawyer, the treasurer and constant attendant of the savings bank told me that the deposits from Cookham were greater than from any other part of the district comprehended by that bank. The averaged annual deposits from Cookham had risen from £310 to £682, and £39.3s.8d. was collected in eight months from the children of the village three new schools have been opened at the instance of Mr. Whateley and were maintained partly by the labourers themselves.

Mr. Whateley was asked –

“Do you believe that the reduction of the poor’s rates by the application of the new system would be as great throughout the country as it has been in your parish? – I have no reason to doubt it. I think one-half or two-thirds off the poor’s rates might be saved; but judging from my experience in my own parish I should say, that even if no money were saved, the moral improvements and increased comforts of the community to be derived from such a system would more .....