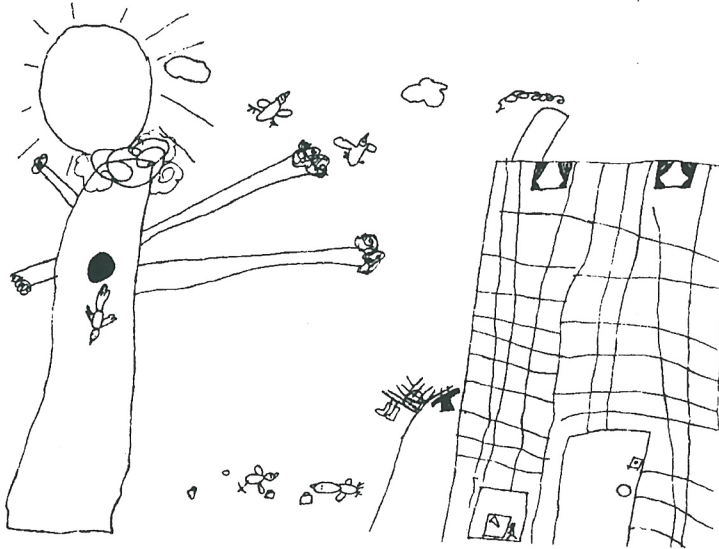




PART SIX

CARING FOR THE DISADVANTAGED



Josie Stephenson, aged 6

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CHRISTIAN CHARITY, POVERTY and ILL HEALTH

It is very difficult, living at the dawn of the twenty first century, to imagine the extent and nature of hardship in ordinary lives before the introduction of the Welfare State. At the same time we need to be aware that circumstances that horrify us today were taken for granted as normal, even desirable, in their day. It is normal to judge ones circumstances and the associated feelings of content and discontent not merely from our actual situation, but also by comparing our living standards with our friends and neighbours. Consequently, it was only a minority of individuals at the upper end of the social scale who were upset by the remedies available and a similar minority at the lower end who were discontented with or ashamed of their lot. Without travel, television and advertising to whet the appetite or education to encourage the idea of improving ones status and circumstances, life was bearable because everyone else in their immediate environment was living in the same way. Wages might be low but as long as they had their youth, their health and regular employment they could maintain an adequate standard of living.

Once national or individual disaster struck it was a different story. It was not merely the absence of provision such as the old age pensions or an unemployment benefit, it was the absence of the whole public apparatus of support and care that we take so much for granted. The problem was not just that individuals were poor or ill, it was that the good times, when they did occur, were always overshadowed by fear. Wages might be just enough to sustain a hand to mouth existence but left little to be saved for a rainy day and rainy days were a regular occurrence. Women were worn down by too frequent childbearing. The life expectancy of every child born was low and it was an unusual family where a child or two hadn't died in infancy. Accidents at work were common as was illness due to poor diet and cold and damp living conditions. Just staying alive created a problem when individuals reached an age where they could no longer work.

Help for those in need had always been the responsibility of the immediate family. It is not valid to argue that people had children merely as an insurance

against poverty and neglect in their declining years, but it certainly helped. Children were expected not merely to care for elderly parents, but also to contribute to general family welfare throughout their lives. This care could be financial but more often involved sharing the house with unmarried relatives, grandparents and grand children, nieces, nephews etc. The problem with this set of expectations was that families tended to share the same economic situation and so could offer little help to each other. Where there was no family or the family couldn't cope there was only private benevolence or institutional charity to fill the gap.

The problem seen through the eyes of the ruling classes, defied general solutions. For them poverty and poor health was not caused by the prevailing economic and social system and therefore could not be solved by reforming the system. Rather it was a problem caused by individual malcontents, the lazy, the immoral and the feckless. National action was necessary only to prevent those individuals from spreading discontent and endangering the system. Consequently solutions were always slow in coming, meagre in their provisions and usually focused on a specific problem causing trouble at that specific time e.g. vagrancy or beggars.

While the basic framework for a government response was laid in Tudor times, responsibility for immediate action was moved from the defunct manorial system and the dissolved church foundations to the parish. But the parish officials were not free to deal with the problem as they chose, but were required to work within the bounds of restrictive and regressive legislation. This involved them in a never ending struggle to distinguish the few deserving poor who could be helped and the more numerous undeserving poor who should be punished.

Christian Charity

Christian charity in the form of individual benevolence and the activities of the great religious foundations (monasteries, abbeys, hospices etc.) had played a dominant role in aid to the sick and the poor throughout the centuries. The only general charitable act that applied to Welborne was the allocation of 3½ acres of land to the poor by the Enclosure Award. This triangular piece of land situated at the extreme western edge of the parish, was as far away from "old" Welborne as it was possible to get and still be in the parish. It is tempting to assume that it was the land least desired by the claimants though there is no proof of this. This small acreage was intended to compensate the non claimants (the labourers and cottagers, old and needy) for those common rights, which had been extinguished by the Enclosure of the wastes, the common land and

the open fields, though the Poor “legally settled in the Parish” would constitute a smaller group than the former. We note here again the concern that outsiders, including people who while living in Welborne did not have settlement rights, should not gain any benefit. Certainly in this respect charity was thought to begin and end at home.

The only general charitable act that applied to Welborne was the allocation of 3½ acres of land to the poor by the Enclosure Award. This triangular piece of land situated at the extreme western edge of the parish, where the Welborne Great Common met Mattishall Heath, was as far away from “old” Welborne as it was possible to get and still be in the parish. It is tempting to assume that it was the land least desired by the claimants though there is no proof of this. This small acreage was intended to compensate the non claimants (the labourers and cottagers, old and needy) for those common rights, which had been extinguished by the Enclosure of the wastes, the common land and the open fields, though the Poor “legally settled in the Parish” would constitute a smaller group than the former. We note here again the concern that outsiders, including people who while living in Welborne did not have settlement rights, should not gain any benefit. Certainly in this respect charity has thought to begin and end at home.

Before there was money for the Rector to distribute to the poor the land would have to be made productive and the easiest solution, in the spirit of individual enterprise that had ended collective agriculture, was to let the land to a neighbouring farmer. We have found only one piece of direct evidence relating to this process in the minutes of the Vestry Meeting of 21st December 1870 concerning the letting of the Town land: “The lease of which to Mr Colls bearing date 1858 expired Michaelmas 1866 and which has been farmed on from year to year by Mr Colls and which he resigned Michs last. The land was let to Mr Francis Smalls subject to the same terms of lease as before for the sum of £8.15.0. Mr Matthew Greenwood of Mattl was named as surety by Mr Smalls and was accepted by the Trustees.” The fact that the leasor was required to provide a guarantor meant that the Trustees for the Poor showed commendable concern that the poor should not suffer from his insolvency or inability to pay. Nor was the leasor given a free hand to farm the land as he chose. The trustees exercised control on the crop as well as the bounds:

“Permission was given to Mr Smalls to clear the whole field and sow it with Turnips and he will then at the 8 years end leave the wheat straw upon the land as provided in the lease. He will open a way from his own field to the land, the hedge being his own and will make it good on his yielding up the land.”

White's directories give a figure of £9 for the rent in 1864 and £8.15.0 for the years 1883 and 1892. It further clarifies matters by stating that this was an annual rent. The value of this piece to farmers seemed to have declined in the twentieth century when the figures are £6, 1902 and 1912, £4.10.0 in 1925 and £5.5.0 1937. Fortunately for the poor this would also coincide with improvement in wages and increased help from other sources.

With such limited resources committed to care of the poor in Welborne, their fate became very dependent on the interest and money raising skills of the Rector. While the church had always played a leading charitable role in theory, in practice the individual Parish was very much at the mercy of the actual clergyman himself and the degree of energy, enthusiasm and time that he could or would devote to this matter. A very spiritual pastor concerned mainly with the afterlife could be as much of a handicap as the absentee clergy of the eighteenth century. The parish therefore must have been very thankful when the living of Welborne was disunited from Yaxham and the Revd John Barham Johnson took up residence here. And their expectations would not have been disappointed as he set about remedying the obvious neglect of the poor with enthusiasm showing considerable skill in persuading, not merely the villagers but also his own friends and relatives, to extend Christian charity towards the poor and needy in Welborne. His son Henry carried on this work when he took on the parish as did the incumbents who followed him.

Clubs and Alms

We have two principle sources to which we can turn for insight into Welborne charity in the nineteenth century – the Communion Alms Account (1844–1862) and two reports Barham Johnson had published in 1866 and 1869, which outline distribution of monies from the offertory collection, as you would expect, but also the activities of the Clubs which he organized.

The clubs appear to constitute the main thrust of his activity and we can allow him to tell us of them in his own words: "This money has been bestowed . . . partly . . . in the maintenance of our clothing club, coal club and the boot and shoe club. The subscribers have been Mrs Edwards and Mrs Stackwood, each 5s a year from 1849 to 1853; Mrs S. Leeds, 5s a year from 1850 to 1856; Revd C St .D Moxon, 10s in 1851; Revd T.J. Cooper 20s in 1856; Miss Morse, 20s in 1857; Mrs C.G. Cobon, 2s.6d in 1858 and 5s a year every subsequent year. I have made up the remainder myself each year." Regarding the disbursement of the club fund Johnson reports: "The premium given to each member of the Clothing Club has this year been 4s. There were 21 members in the club, one of them only received 2s; . . . to each member of the Coal Club

nearly 6s; * there were 20 members . . . nine adults have availed themselves of the Boot and Shoe Club, and two children; the adults have received 2s each, the children 1s each.”

Unfortunately, although he probably kept meticulous lists he was sensitive enough not to include the names of people dependent on this charity in this published account. This is the contrast to the alms account where individuals were named and the amount received was recorded down to the last farthing. The generosity of the donors, which merited praise and possibly even a subtle invitation to follow the lead of those worthy individuals, was made public knowledge and while the non clerical subscribers were all women, the men could be counted in to be generous in more practical ways. The * above recording the fact that “the coals have been carted free: by Mr Cobon, 6 tons; Mr Porrett, 2; Mr Green, 1; Mr Holland 1.” Each member of the coal club thus receiving 10 cwt or half a ton. We can compare the generous nature of this quantity with the single cwt recorded in the alms book for the 4th quarter 1853.

We have only one other item that can shed some light on the matter from the perspective of the recipients from the Vestry Meeting 30/10/73: “There attended this meeting Thomas Olley, Robert Smalls and Charles Elliott to urge their claims as inhabitants of Welborne and payers of poor rates to a share in the coal money [and] the Rent of the Poor Lands which is distributed annually at Christmas. The Chairman explained that acting under advice given . . . some years ago, the Trustees have hitherto only distributed the money among the legally settled poor, residing in the Parish and that they conceived they were acting legally in their present mode of distributing the money but that the matter should be enquired into and should any recent Act of Parliament have given them permission they would, in future, include them and those of similar circumstances in the number of recipients of the money.” Olley at the time was a 33 year old Brickmaker living with his wife and 14 year old stepson. Smalls a 27 year old agricultural labourer, with a wife and five children under ten. Elliott a 32 year old agricultural labourer with a wife and an 11 year old son, who also had his 60 year old mother-in-law Mary Dale living with them. All three men were neighbours living in the set of four cottages near the Brickyards . None of the adults had been born in Welborne but four of Robert Smalls children and Charles Elliott’s son were.

The following tables relating to the Club Accounts (1869 Report) give you an indication of the amounts involved.

CLOTHING CLUB ACCOUNTS, 1868

RECEIVED	£.	s.	d.	PAID	£.	s.	d.
From Offertory fund	4	0	6	premium of 4s each upon			
Mr Cobon's Subscription	0	5	0	the subscription of the			
Mr Wrigglesworth's donation	0	2	6	22 members of the Club	4	8	0
	<hr/>				<hr/>		
	£4	8	0		£4	8	0
	<hr/>				<hr/>		

COAL CLUB ACCOUNT, 1868

RECEIVED	£.	s.	d.	PAID	£.	s.	d.
From the Offertory fund	5	11	6	A Premium of 5s. 3d			
Mr Holland's Subscription	0	4	0	each upon the Sub-			
				scription of the 22			
				members of the Club	5	15	6
	<hr/>				<hr/>		
	£5	15	6		£5	15	6
	<hr/>				<hr/>		

BOOT CLUB ACCOUNT, 1868

RECEIVED	£	s	d	PAID	£	s	d
From the Offertory fund	1	10	0	Premium of 2s. each			
				to 12 Adults	1	4	0
				Premium of 1s. each			
				to 6 Children	0	6	0
	<hr/>				<hr/>		
	£1	10	0		£1	10	0
	<hr/>				<hr/>		

This account seems to be typical for this period, there being a difference of only one shilling between the figures for 1866 and 68. The act of alms giving has deep roots in Christian tradition and alms houses were a common feature of pre-reformation England. By the mid nineteenth century however, the parish church and its congregation provided the bulk of funds available for this purpose. And while we have noted above the large size of the congregations at this time, we also recorded the Rectors concern that most attended the afternoon service when there was no collection. In comparison the number who attended in the morning was much smaller.

“The alms to the sick and needy have been given, by myself and Mr Joyce [the curate] to the sick, the aged and the disabled from work, in a small sum where we have thought help was needed.”

Having raised the money the Rector also had the pleasure/responsibility of disposing of it: “The alms to the sick and needy have been given, by myself and Mr Joyce [the curate] to the sick, the aged and the disabled from work, in a small sum where we have thought help was needed.” We would emphasize two points in this statement. The distribution in small amounts while in one sense reflects unwillingness to trust these individuals to husband their own resources over a period of more than a week, also underlines the basic subsistence – non monetary basis of everyday life for the ordinary people and the lack of any budgeting/saving dimension. Also we note that help was at the discretion of the Clergy and can only hope that their charity extended to the families of the ‘black’ sheep of the parish as well as to the regular church goers.

Table 2 Communion Alms Account (1844)

<u>Receipts</u>		
Sept 1	1st monthly communion	4. 9 ¹ / ₂
Oct 6	2nd monthly communion	8. 6 ¹ / ₂
Nov 3	3rd monthly communion	10. 10 ¹ / ₂
Nov 24	4th monthly communion	8. 7 ¹ / ₂
		£1. 12. 9 ¹ / ₂
<u>Payments</u>		
Nov 5	W Dales wife (confinement)	2.6
Nov 18	Do Do	2.6.
Nov 19	W Tilney	2.6.
Nov 24	J's Mapes	3.0.
Dec 13	Old Jas Dale	2.0.
Dec 14	J's Mapes	1.0.
Paid for clothing for those who did not put into the Clothing Club		19.3 ¹ / ₂
		£1. 12.9 ¹ / ₂

We can also summarize the total amounts from the offertory collection as reported by the Rector: for the 17 years 1844–1860 a total of £96.3.10 with a further £26.0.8 in 1861–65. The yearly average was £6 ranging from the low of the first year to the high of £7.8.6 in 1860. To this can be added the club subscriptions £72.6.1 (clothing) Coal Club 1861–5 £19.3.0. both averaging £3.10.0. year.

So who were the alms takers? It is clear when we analyze the names recorded that it was the precarious nature of employment in agriculture that most often created the circumstances that forced men and women to turn to charity to make ends meet. Before looking at individual cases we can summarize the types of distribution and some general cases. Each year between 1847 and 1855 there were expenses for winter soup, which provide what little insight we have into local diet and costs. The 1847 ingredients included peas at 1/6d, groats at £1.0.9d and two shin of beef 3/9d – totalling £1.6.0. Two years later for the sum of £2.10.2d, 247 quarts (61¾ gallons) was made. In 1850, 48 gallons was produced at a cost, which included 19/7d for meat and 10/7½ for peas. Gifts were also given at Christmas, in 1848, seven people received amounts ranging from 1/- to 3/-. Barham Johnson added a memo in 1849 to the effect that the “Christian gifts was not made out of this fund this year but from the parsonage.” Other special occasions could generate a general alms distribution eg. May 1856 we find 1/- being given to every family of a labourer in thanksgiving for Peace (the end of the Crimean War we assume).

Welborne also had the equivalent of today’s pensioners winter fuel payment. In 1853, 1 cwt of coal was given to each of twenty poor people at a cost of £1.4.6 so we can calculate that coal was 1/2¼ per cwt, a prohibitive cost for those whose weekly aid was 1/- shilling. In 1856 at a cost of 1/- each it was distributed to nineteen families and similar amounts are recorded for subsequent years. We can also note that those individuals who “did not put into the clothing club” were not completely ignored being allocated 19/3½ at the end of 1844.

There appears to be two situations where funds were automatically available. On confinement, irrespective of the number of children, the wife was given 5/-. At least the entry was recorded as X’s wife, we have no evidence that the cash was actually handed to the woman rather than her husband or that it was spent purely in the expenses related to the birth of a new baby. Between 1844 and 1856 twenty-one payments were made. Unfortunately for Elizabeth Holland the sum wasn’t adjusted for multiple births so she had only five shillings although confined with twins in 1858. The other automatic payment was made on the melancholy occasion and to help deal with the expenses associated with a death in the family, eg. in 1850 William Rice received five shillings for the funeral of his son twenty-one year old Robert. The Ball family received both types of payment: The young couple Henry and Mary receiving five shillings for each of the confinements related to the birth of daughters Mary Anne and Susan and son John, while Henry’s mother has

five shillings for her husband's funeral and another five shillings towards the funeral of her grand daughter Harriet.

Aside from unemployment, medically related causes constitute the bulk of individual alms awards (see below). Two other aspects are of particular interest: the giving of help tied to specific ends or in kind and giving cash for helping others, e.g. in 1856 three widows and two others were given 2/6d as help towards paying their rent and buying fuel. Food, clothes and household linen were also listed. In 1861 Henry and Mrs Howe received five shillings covering help for Mrs Vincent for eighteen weeks, so we shouldn't run away with the idea that the aid was generous. One is left to wonder what happened to W. Vincent's two pigs in 1862 that the Rector was prepared to grant him five shillings for their loss!

Health

Changes in current provisions for social service, has raised the spectre in the minds of some, of struggling to pay for healthcare or not being able to afford it at all. But it is hard to imagine, cushioned as we have been by the NHS, good salaries and preventative medicine, the situation which earlier residents of Welborne faced when they were unfortunate enough to have an accident or fall ill. We use the word 'when', rather than 'if', for sickness was so prevalent and medical knowledge and training still so limited that few escaped its regular occurrence. As late as the 1890s the Earl of Kimberley "successfully opposed the installation of baths and other sanitary improvements at the [Wicklewood] Workhouse . . . on the grounds that bathing was dangerous to health." (Digby 1978).

Infectious diseases were still the main culprit; while the smallpox vaccine had been pioneered in the eighteenth century, this disease was still listed as a cause of death in the Workhouse records at the end of the century. Two cholera epidemics were to sweep the country in 1831–3 and 1865–6 not to mention typhus, typhoid and the ever-present consumption (or tuberculosis). For those who escaped or survived these diseases, common complaints such as coughs, fevers and diarrhoea, could bring a sudden end in the days before antibiotics and any simple accident could fester and lead to gangrene or mortification. The list is almost endless.

These diseases and accidents, when they did occur had to be routinely dealt with in the home and on the basis of family knowledge and village wisdom or 'old wives tales'. Very few families in Welborne would have been able to afford the services of Mattishall surgeon George Taylor, though ironically those who did may have done so by virtue of his appointment as one of the

five medical men serving the poor at Wicklewood. There are only two references to doctor's bills in the alms accounts and both concerned Mary Jeffries, daughter of the groom/gardener, at the parsonage. The 2/6d that was provided towards the expense of her doctor's bill in 1861, had been a donation from a Costessey resident. There was only one reference to funds for a nurse, for Widow Stephen Woodhouse, though neighbours often acted as surrogate nurses e.g. Elizabeth Holland was given 2/6d for assisting Mrs R Howe when ill in 1857; Mrs Howe herself received 5/- in 1861 for helping Mrs Vincent.

There is a series of entries that imply ill health – William Balls 1848 “in bed”, Henry Howe 1853 “confined to bed” or accidents (Charles Smalls 1851, Holly 1852). There was also specific medical causes – burns (Golden boy 1847) recovering from fever (Balls son, 1855) and typhus (Rob Holly 1847) as well as cases of ‘lameness to leg’ (James Brand 1851, Holley 1856, Howard 1862) and of the hand (Brand 1856). There is also evidence of help being given for specific remedies. Between 1848–56 three individuals were given money for porter (a dark ale) and three others, a shilling for wine during illness.

When good intentions and other remedies failed; in selected cases only hospitalization might follow, creating two separate issues – maintenance and family access. Between 1848 and 58 five payments were made to help families when the husband/father was going to, in or just returning from hospital – Rob Holley (1848) 2/-; William Balls (1805–1) 1/6, 2/- and 7/6, Elizabeth Holland's husband (1858) 2/6d. Barham Johnson reported in 1866 that a subscription of two guineas was sent to the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital at the beginning of the year, from funds not spent the previous year and he continued: “we hope to subscribe two guineas again next year . . . I have it at heart that we should annually contribute towards the funds of the hospital, not so much with a view to our becoming entitled to the “recommendations” [for admission] that such a subscription will give to our parish, though this is a great convenience, as because in so doing we shall be devoting some of our money to deserving objects beyond the bounds of our parish.” The next year, a donation of £7.10.0 was made, the sum reflecting a “collection on the Thanksgiving from exemption from The Cattle Disease, Wednesday evening 17 October 1866.”

Given the intermarriage of people within a relatively small catchment area and the age, at which women continued to give birth, it is rather surprising to find so few examples of mental illness in the records. The best documented case appears in the Vestry minutes not because of concern with the health problem, but because of a dispute over who should pay when the individual was sent to Thorpe Asylum. As the person concerned had been born in

Mattishall before his parents moved to Welborne, the meeting “agreed unanimously that none of the expenses of his maintenance should be born by the parish”. The records show that four Welborne people died in the Thorpe Asylum.

While on the subject of death, we can note two further accidental deaths: Susan Palmer (11) drowned in 1840, John Dale (18) killed by a train while working on track maintenance in 1872. Nine-year-old Marianna Dale died in the Norfolk and Norwich and Sarah Norton’s infant daughter Elizabeth, in 1878 in the Workhouse, of a cough! One man James Thurgill (75) was buried there in 1880 and three woman Ann Balls (54) in 1881, Rose Meyers (78) in 1885 and Mary Leeds (84) in 1904, died in the Workhouse but were buried in the village.

The Mrs Dales’ Diaries

How exciting it would have been if we had been able to find diaries kept by some ordinary Welborne women, detailing their hopes and fears as well as the everyday details of family life. Unfortunately, very few of them would have known how to read or write and if they did, had neither the time nor the means to keep such a record. So once again we are left with our imagination to fill the gap between the census details and the parish records. The Dales were another of those families that span six generations of unbroken residence in Welborne. In choosing to look at life through the eyes of the wives we are getting an outsiders perspective, as none of them was Welborne born.

The first of the Mary Dales lived here during the early part of the eighteenth century, with her husband William, probably in the double cottage on the Lowndes, claimed by her son Charles in 1811. She lived to witness her son William’s marriage, to comfort him on the death of his wife and to care for his son James until his second marriage to Ann Greeves. His happiness was short-lived as he died in 1791 when only 50. Her son John married Susannah Means, soon after but they too had sorrow when two of their three sons died in childhood.

Our second Mary Dale, nee Smith, came to Welborne from Great Ellingham after her marriage to James, the eldest son of William Junior. Her life fell into the regular pattern of the times with eleven children. However, the fact that they were spread over 21 years and the two of the three girls were born early in the sequence, may have meant that life in their crowded cottage may not have been as fraught as in other parts of the village. While they owned the property (held by her brother-in-law Charles in 1811), it had only a quarter acre of land attached to it and James was forced to abandon his attempt to

make a living as a smallholder and hire out his labour along with that of his sons. Mary's early married life could have been quite lonely, stranded as she was between the two settlements of Brandon Parva and Welborne with a long walk up the ancient footpath to the church.

She nevertheless seemed to have made a good impression on the rector, who described her as, James "tidy wife". At some stage her husband must have had an accident for the rector also adds, "among the few communicants [in the 1820s] old wooden legged James Dale who then had a cottage of his own on the Lowndes." But godliness doesn't appear to have gone hand in hand with goodness.' The thirties started off reasonably well for Mary. Son William had married yet another Mary, this one from Carbrook and already presented her with her first granddaughter. Then her oldest son Thomas, married and two grandsons joined the growing family. In 1836 disaster struck when her husband and three sons were arrested and the three boys were convicted and sent to Australia. We suspect that her sorrow at the loss of her three boys may have been greater than her relief that her husband was spared, on economic if not on emotional grounds. James was by now in his 60s and his earning capacity was decreasing. She may not have been able to count on Thomas's money now that he was married and had a family of his own but John and Jeremiah were just out of their teens and could have been expected to contribute to the general welfare for a few more years. In fact economically things must have got increasingly worse. James married the following year and by the end of the 1830s, there were five more grandchildren to feed and clothe. The 1841 census finds James and Mary now 60, living with their youngest child Charles, now 15 and bringing in money from farm work. But the family had to resort to the parish alms, regularly receiving sums of one or two shillings. They had by now moved into the village proper and we assume rented a cottage. James Jr. and his wife Rhoda with their three children lived a few houses away, William and his family had left Welborne and their three girls all had live-in jobs outside the village. But life continued to throw problems Mary's way when oldest daughter Sarah gave birth to an illegitimate son (Thomas Doy) in 1842 and youngest daughter Susan gave birth to George August 1844. She however did marry the father of her illegitimate child the following year.

By 1851 there were again three 'Mrs Dales' in the village, William and Mary had returned with their last five children. James and Rhoda, after a brief spell working in Barnham Broom, had also returned and their son Stephen had begun work as a farmyard boy. Mary and James Jr. were now officially labelled paupers but Charles (29) was still at home and in work and they

supplemented their income by taking in lodgers, two single working men and two elderly widows, paupers like themselves. Mary is now 76, And we should not forget our fourth Mary Dale her unmarried daughter aged 43 and living-in as a general servant at Francis Smalls' house and therefore of little help to her mother.

It must have been a challenge for Mary to provide meals and keep up the house when all was well but at least one of the widows, Mary Edwards (88) was not in good health. The alms account for 1851 shows James Dale receiving 6/6d "in consideration of the trouble occasioned them during her illness" and the following year 6d a week for five weeks for "taking care of the Widow Edwards". In 1852 she died and they received 2/6d to help cover incidental expenses and 13/- for their own care. Throughout the fifties they were to receive small sums from the alms. Mary died in 1857 but James lived on for another seven years and daughter Mary was brought home to care for father and the two lodgers and also her nephew, Youngs. The move from paid employment back to unpaid labour may not have been something that she relished but she did her duty and it gave her a new occupation after her father died as lodging housekeeper!

Life had not gone smoothly for the second Mary Dale either. During the 40's she had had to resort frequently to charity receiving money to tide the family over during sickness, for her confinements and for accidents. She also received in 1851 payments for heat, flour, bread, a distribution of coal and a flannel waistcoat for husband William. His death in 1853 didn't improve matters and in the same year she received money for 'illness', 'bread and coal', and to buy clothes for her daughters. The story is repeated year after year – children ill and out of work 1854 along with "clothes for girl Mary"; clothing and help with rent 1855 and so on. The fact that she was receiving this charity didn't mean she was excused from trying to help herself. In 1861 she and her three youngest boys were all listed as field workers. Her daughter, the fifth Mary Dale had married agricultural labourer Charles Elliott and they were staying in the cottage with their one-year-old son at the time of the census. They were to reciprocate and give Mary a home the next decade.

James Jr's wife Rhoda, suffered from a lot of illness following the birth of her son Youngs in 1847. She was obviously unable to depend on her in-laws for help as the alms book for 1852 shows payments to Mrs Vincent (3/-) for "attendance upon Rhoda Dale", and there were twelve further payments made due to her poor health in that year. All to no avail; after her death, her in-laws cared for Youngs, receiving 2/- to buy him boots in 1856, while "old Mrs Denny had 1/- in 1854 for Jas. Dales children". The final Mrs Dale to appear

in Welborne, was born Rachel Middleton, daughter of the Mattishall Thatcher William, she married Charles, the youngest son of James Jr. and Mary in 1858. They had five children, the youngest of whom died in 1868 along with his mother. Charles returned to Welborne in 1871 with three of the children but Marianna died in 1875 (aged 9) and John was killed in 1882 in a railway accident while still only nineteen. It is interesting to note, that while the Dales as a family were the heaviest beneficiary of parish charity, they do not appear to have ever been sent to the Workhouse. We could suggest that the means some of them used to avoid it were dubious, and that transportation to Australia was perhaps a fate worse than Wicklewood!

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

WELBORNE and the WORKHOUSE

Given the popularity of Dickens among TV producers and the regular appearance of *Oliver Twist* on our screens, most people are aware of the existence of workhouses in nineteenth century England, and of the terrible conditions in some of them. You may also have visited or passed by Gressenhall the largest workhouse in Norfolk, now a museum of rural life but still an awesome sight. The dreaded institution, which was the fate of Welborne's destitute, is tucked away from our view in the smaller village of Wicklewood, strategically situated between the two largest parishes in the Hundred – Wymondham and Hingham.

This House of Industry has been described by Anne Digby (1978: 39) as: "Another monumental building . . . where classical symmetry was achieved in a rectangular block with a central feature consisting of a pedimented entrance." It is hard to believe that the wretched families forced to leave their poor but familiar cottages for this 'Pauper's Palace' had the time or the inclination to admire the architecture. The two balanced wings represented to them separation by gender and age not classical symmetry. The palatialness of the building adds an ironical touch given the niggardly aid that was given to the poor and the deliberate harshness of the regime within. (Perhaps the final irony is the fact that the building is today being transformed into luxury houses and flats). It was not by accident that conditions were so poor. The ruling class, whose own life style, could only be characterized as one of idleness, indolence, licentiousness and conspicuous consumption were convinced that these were the characteristics of the lower classes, especially the undeserving poor and that won't work, rather than can't find work was at the heart of the problem. They had persuaded the more industrious landowners and tradesmen that this was the case and that there was a definite and potential threat to their safety and prosperity if this class was treated in a benevolent or/and humanitarian way. This after all was the time of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars which convulsed Europe and frightened the privileged in England.

Early Union

The parish of Welborne had been among those parishes who made an early move away from attempting to house and maintain the needy within their own boundaries, to embrace the union approach. The first widespread adoption of this solution to financial strain followed the passage of Gilbert's Act (1781–2) but Unions did not become compulsory until the Poor Law Amendment Act (1834). It seems likely that Welborne took advantage of a general permissive Work House Act (1722–3) when it joined 24 other parishes in the Hundred to initiate an individual act of Parliament passed in 1776 to incorporate the Forehoe Hundred Union for the purposes of maintaining the poor and the erection of a House of Industry. Given the relatively small size of Welborne compared to other parishes in the hundred, it was unlikely that the parish officials of Welborne had a very large say in the general developments which followed, but it would have relieved some of the financial and other burdens of trying to deal with this increasingly demanding problem on their own. Of course, in the short term, it created an additional financial burden as land had to be attained for a site and the building erected and staffed. This cost of £11,000, no inconsiderable sum in the eighteenth century, was found in a quasi lottery scheme – a Tontine. The cost of the structure was divided into 110 shares of £100 each. A subscriber nominated a young person as beneficiary, gambling on the length of time the individual would live, for the interest 5 per cent was only paid to the subscriber as long as their nominee remained alive. The survivor scooped the pool. (We can note in passing that the number of survivors had been reduced to thirty by 1844). Discharging the interest on this original capital would be the first charge on the Directors and Board, as we can see from the minutes of the Quarterly meeting 1st January 1827, which still lists “paying those dividends or interest of the money borrowed” ahead of “expenses of maintaining the poor” and “several other purposes” when assessing the funds to be raised. It is hoped that as a relatively new establishment it did not succumb to the incapacity, negligence and misconduct that produced the subsequent legislation designed to increase supervision and reform the worst sufferings of the inmates.

The earliest record (Stock-book and register of deaths 1777, Governor's disbursement, expenses and report books 1778) suggest that the House began to receive inmates (ironically called the family) as soon as the building was completed. Apparently the authorities anticipated a decline in outdoor relief and an increase in indoor, as the building had places for 400, which would have represented around 3–4 per cent of the population. The actual number of inmates was usually less than half its capacity. Whatever idiosyncratic methods of

organization it developed in the early years, it was expected after 1834 to conform to the system outlined for the nation and to work under the general authority of the three National Poor Law Commissioners and the direct supervision of a Board of Guardians made up of representatives from each parish.

Guardians

The record of the individuals who served as Guardians in Welborne is incomplete but it fulfils our expectations, given that the office had a property qualification (normally to occupy property rated at least £40 a year), which limited the number of parishioners, who would constitute the pool from which the Welborne representative would be annually chosen. Thus of the twelve individuals we know served as Guardians between 1848 and 1906, all were farmers except for the two periods when the Rectors, John and then Henry Barham Johnson took the office. All but the clergy and two farmers had also served as Overseers. Age does not appear to have been as important a factor as substance, as men served as young as 28 years and as old as 73. The smallest amount of land farmed by a Guardian was 47 acres. Most of the men were employers as well as land owners even if they had only one boy in their employment. The longest period of service was that of William Kerridge Green. He was 31 when he served his first term in 1875. Charles G. Cobon the village's major employer in the 1870s. He was 70–71 when he served in 1873–4, Charles Green had served for a year in 1856 when he was 61 and Stephen Leeds for five years, commencing when he was only 28 in 1849. Among the smaller farmers we have Stephen Dann, John Edwards, Robert Holland, Richard Porrett (when 73) and William Land the last on record. We even find John Dring serving for a year in 1887.

The Quarterly Meeting, usually held at an Inn in Wymondham, settled general financial matters and a Weekly Meeting, in the house, dealt with decisions regarding the granting of relief to individuals.

It would be tedious to detail for you every contact that inhabitants of Welborne had with the authorities in Wicklewood, interesting as it has been to turn hundreds of pages in dozens of elaborately bound volumes searching for records of Welborne. Instead we have chosen to concentrate on three volumes of minutes Nos. 24–6 dealing with weekly meetings between December 1826 and September 1830 to attempt to summarize the situation regarding outdoor relief and a few volumes of the Admissions and Discharge books to identify the unfortunates forced into the House to obtain relief.

One of our general impressions was that the number of Welborne individuals considered at the weekly meetings, was significantly lower than

some of the parishes of similar size or slightly larger in the hundred. Time did not permit us to support this perception with statistical analysis. We can however analyse the occurrence patterns of Welborne residents during this period when thirty-five separate names appeared.

Table 1 Number of Appearances

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	20
44	15	7	2	5	2	3	2	3	-	1	1	1

At the latter end of the scale we find a group who were more or less permanently supported by the poor rate: five of these were elderly widows Mary Groom, Mary Gowns, Rebecca Small, Hannah Curson[s] and the widow Cross; and four men William Norton William Goward (six children), Francis Palmer (eight children) and William Balls (six later seven children). For them relief was allocated for the whole quarter. Howard Kerrison joined the group for 25 weeks. A typical entry would read like that of 24 December 1827: "Mr Palmer Overseer for relief allowed the following

Mary Goun [s]	13 weeks	0.13.0	ie.	1/- a week
Hannah Curson [s]	13 weeks	19.6		1/6
Rebecca Small [s]	13 weeks	1 .5.0		1/11
Mary Groom	13 weeks	1. 6.0		2/-
Francis Palmer	13 weeks	19.6		1/6
Wm Goward	13 weeks	19.6		1/6
Wm Norton	13 weeks	19.6		1/6
Wm Balls	5 weeks	7.6		1/6

If we adjust our collation to omit these individuals we find:

Table 2 Frequency of Appearance

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	20
9	2	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

John Holliday, labourer, is significant in that most of his appearances were for a single week only. The general assumption is that individuals who appeared without any further explanation were the unemployed poor. Other grounds for granting relief and the number of times each was mentioned including and having x number of children (61), bad leg or lame (4) illness-self (16) illness

– child (1), illness – wife (5), wife confined (3), lame hand or arm (6) bad eyes (1), age (3). Grounds given for increasing amount paid included cut and lame hand in which case the relief was to last until they were able to work viz 2 or 3 weeks and twice because of numbers of children. Only twice was the payment qualified i.e. towards clothes. During this period only one youth appeared in his own right rather than as a member of a family, 16 year old John Tice.

We can consider William Goward as a typical case on his appearance on 18/12/26 it was noted “having six children and a bad leg” and he was allowed 8/- and on a subsequent appearance a week later allowed 1/6 a week for 26 weeks. This situation continued until 6th April 1829 when with an additional child and wife ill, he received 4/- On the 19th of the same month with his wife now confined he was granted a further 4/- and his weekly relief increased to 2/- until 1st February 1830 when illness of his son produces a further 2/-. He continued to the end of our survey period on 2/- a week.

The Woodhouses and the Workhouse

At a time when it was becoming increasingly difficult for hardworking and experienced agricultural workers to find employment, those who were flawed in any way faced a really uphill task. There seemed little reason to feel sympathy for the 29-year-old Welborne man who turned up at the Vestry Meeting on the 25th March 1857: “Elias Woodhouse lately returned from Yorkshire (where he had been working for many months past leaving his child un-provided for in the care of his mother (Widow Edw Woodhouse) came to ask for work which no one present was disposed to offer him. This man was discharged for drunkenness and he has given no proof that his character is improved. He left the meeting declaring that he should consider himself obliged to seek work where it was to be had.”

The Welborne farmers seem less understanding of his predicament than we might be today. On the one hand he seems to be condemned for working away from the parish or at least for leaving his child here, while at the same time being refused a job here. What had driven Elias to drink? A weak character or life’s hard knocks? We set out to find as much as we could of his early circumstances and uncovered both a poverty trap and a murky family past. Despite the fact that the Woodhouses had supposedly been born in Welborne, they didn’t seem to be in the parish registers on the appropriate dates. Fortunately for us Barham Johnson came to our rescue with a note added later in the records ‘Woodhouse alias Denny!’ Armed with this clue we were able to trace his family back to the Denney family in Brandon Parva where Thomas

and Elizabeth had lived in the mid-eighteenth century. This revealed a second link with Welborne for their second child Judith had married Robert Wright who farmed 11 acres of Welborne land (between Solomon's Temple and Brandon House farm). The stronger link with this parish was forged when John Denney, a widower married Mary Woodhouse in 1801. Their four sons George, Robert, Edward and Stephen were all baptised as Dennys in Welborne Church. By the time their children were being brought forward for baptism all four of them were calling themselves by their mother's maiden name. (We have not been able to discover what the momentous event was that brought about this transformation.)

The family appeared quite frequently in the parish records over the next half century, as Edward's six children and Stephen's ten children were baptised and later married. Robert remained a bachelor for the whole of his 64 years, which obviously contributed to his longevity none of his brothers made it past their 45th birthday. From the parish registers we got little that would explain Elias' downfall. Like George and Stephen his father, Edward had been employed as a farm worker until a few years before his death when he became a bricklayer, he had six children, was not a large family. But things were not as they appeared as we found when we turned to the records of the Wicklewood House of Industry. It was his Uncle George who first caught our eye when he was given outdoor relief of 5/- in November 1829, because he had dislocated his arm, a problem which persisted for several weeks. He was too ill to work three months later and in fact appeared on seven occasions asking for help in that year. His Uncle Stephen was unable to work around the same time due to a lame hand and was also ill for seven weeks the following year, during which he received sums ranging from 1/6d to 4/-. Elias was only two when his father suffered the same fate. Whether their frequent illnesses contributed to subsequent developments we don't know. What we do know is, that by the mid-thirties lack of work had sent George and Stephen to the Workhouse at a time when Elias had need of their support following the death of his father in 1836.

George with his wife Elizabeth and their three children entered the Workhouse on Christmas Eve 1836. It must have been heartbreaking for the children to be separated from their parents as such a time and for Elizabeth shut away in the women's wing away from both her husband and her children, young Alfred was only three at the time. They were not discharged until 25th March 1837, when they moved to Mattishall. The Stephen Woodhouse's at least got to spend Christmas together the following year, his inability to find work didn't drive them to Wicklewood until early February and they stayed

only 10 days. While their stay was comparatively short, it must have been debilitating. Stephen appears to have found work as an agricultural labourer appearing as such in the 1841 census. But illness of his wife forced them to ask for alms in 1845 and 1847 and the confinement associated with the birth of a sixth child in 1848 saw them receiving 2/6d and money because “girl Susan sick” in 1850. By 1848 Stephen had also moved to Mattishall where the youngest child Mary Ann was born. The 1851 census shows the family in Mattishall Burgh where Stephen has work as a farm labourer and 19 year old David has work as a drover. Stephen must have died soon after, as this wife Sarah is identified as a widow in the Alms book for 1854, and she received a small amount from this source for the next two years, including 4/- for a nurse and 2/6 towards the rent. She was unfortunate to have to return to Wicklewood at the turn of the decade. While she received the Christmas gift of Alms in 1860, her 2/- received in the second quarter of 1861 showed her as on leave from the Union Workhouse. Nevertheless she seems to have got back on her feet by 1871, when she is working as a washerwoman, and living with her unmarried daughter Elizabeth a dressmaker.

Ten-year-old Elias thus had a lot of second-hand knowledge of what was in store for him when his mother, unable to support herself and the children after her husband died, was forced to move them all to the Workhouse. Hearing about life in the workhouse is one thing; living it was something else. The first jolt was the segregation and the lack of contact with the other members of the family even though they were in the same building. This separation was total. The different genders and age groups not only slept in different sections but also were kept apart during meals, recreation and work. Elias did have his brother Edward, a year older, with him which would have been some consolation. We don't know what work he was expected to do: possibly help out on the House farm as he was rather young for the other jobs given to the men – shoemaking, linen weaving, tailoring. Hopefully he wasn't called on to pick or bunch hemp. His mother may have been lucky enough to get a semi-skilled job spinning, knitting, weaving or plain work (making caps, shirts, shifts, aprons and sheets). All jobs which were preferable to the heavy jobs of kitchen help, cleaning and laundry.

While it has been argued that education “was often taken more seriously” in the workhouse than outside it at this time, the 1841 census shows both a resident school master and a school mistress, it is unlikely that Elias was literate. He was an adult by the time the Welborne School was opened and his parents would not have been able to send him to one of the Mattishall Dame schools even if they had the inclination, which was equally unlikely. However,

he appears to have been fortunate enough to get a job and did not return to the workhouse when destitution forced Mary with Edward and the three girls to return therefore three months in March 1845. If so, he was luckier than the rest of the family. When his Uncle George died his widow Elizabeth was unable to find work and she and her sixteen-year-old daughter went back to Wicklewood in 1847. She was forced to depend on parish alms throughout this year and the one that followed.

The fourth brother Uncle Robert avoided the workhouse but was forced to apply for parish alms in the fifties. He received small amounts, 1–2 shillings during the first half of the decade. If a single man could fall on hard times how much more difficult was life for his widowed sister-in-law. Even with the two boys in work Mary Anne Woodhouse found making ends meet difficult and was forced to ask for help from the alms account and this situation got worse. The eldest boy Edward Jr. was injured and as a result was permanently lame and unable to work. By 1846 he was back in the workhouse and was to stay there until his death in 1852 still only 27. Twice a year for two or three days at Christmas and again in May or June he was given leave of absence from Wicklewood to visit his family in Welborne.

Elias struck out on his own in 1850, when still only 22, he married Susan Neave and moved in to a separate cottage. Not the wisest move you might think, but an understandable one that contributed to the downward spiral that sociologists have labelled as the poverty trap, whereby children repeat the life cycle of their parents. Soon after the marriage, he appeared in the minutes of the weekly meeting at Wicklewood, asking for and being granted outdoor relief. The birth of their first child caused additional hardship and their assistance was increased to 1/6 in 1853. The following year a second confinement was followed by the melancholy record of 5/- granted for 'funeral of his wife and child.' Three years later, he had damaged his leg and received 2/- for crutches and 4/- for journey (to hospital perhaps?) Enough to drive a man to drink? He seems to have been unable to find a job in Welborne and was doing contract work for Thomas Tice the tenant of the Onley's Dairy House Farm property in Brandon until he was discharged for drunkenness.

His mother, now humiliatingly labelled 'a pauper', was the only one to whom he could turn for care for daughter Lucy, however he did not marry for a second time as many men in his situation did. Nor could he get any help from other members of his extended families. The three Woodhouse widows were struggling to keep afloat. Of his numerous cousins Maria Anne had married and moved to Hingham where her mother Sarah later joined her. Her sister Mary Ann had married into another old Welborne family (James Mapes)

and moved to Hethersett. Of his own sisters Susan had died in 1854 (27) and Anne had married and moved to Hockering. The younger two were still at home with their mother. Only his cousin David (Stephen's oldest son) was still in Welborne. He fortunately had found some farm work but had to help to bring up his sister while unmarried and then embarked on a family of his own. When Elias returned to Welborne, David had just seen the first of his nine children born and would have his hands full for the rest of his life in the village. However, we have no record of him turning 'to the bottle'. Our last sighting of any of the family, is the 65-year-old widow, Sarah working as a washerwoman in 1871.

