

Workhouses in Aylesbury

During the 16th Century the Enclosures Acts resulted in smallholders losing the right to free grazing, trapping, fishing and cutting wood. Many became destitute, with no means of supporting themselves and their families. Enclosures in Aylesbury continued until the 1870s.

This so affected Aylesbury people that a significant proportion of the population lived from hand to mouth. Anyone caught stealing, however small the item, could be punished by public hanging or flogging, or a long period in jail.

Some early attempts were made to collect voluntary alms for the poor, but in 1572 a law was passed whereby towns and parishes were compelled to organise their own poor relief system. This was to be funded by local taxes, in order to provide flax, wood, hemp or other items for the poor to work on. Parishes were required to build poor (or alms) houses. In 1675-7 a law was passed obliging people in receipt of parish relief to wear a badge of blue or red cloth bearing a large letter 'P', together with the first letter of their parish. Anyone refusing to wear the badge was severely punished by withdrawal of parish relief, whipping, or 21 days hard labour. In 1697, one Elizabeth Miles complained that the overseers of Aylesbury refused to give her relief unless she agreed to wear "a badge according to the late Act of Parliament."

From around 1640 a workhouse existed in Aylesbury where children were taught trades and the poor worked initially on making rope, and at a later date, lace. The workhouse was located at the corner of St. Mary's Square and Pebble Lane, and a Parliamentary report of 1777 records that it accommodated up to 90 inmates. The inmates consisted of what were then known as paupers, lunatics, idiots, imbeciles, infirm, elderly, orphans, unmarried mothers, etc.

By 1829 conditions in the workhouse were considered to be inadequate and a new workhouse was built on land adjoining Mill Close at a cost of approximately £3,000 for the building and £500 for the land. The auction of the old workhouse was advertised in the Bucks Gazette on the 19th June and held on the 24th June 1830 at the Bell Inn. It was conducted by a Mr.



Photo courtesy of Keith Turner

Rainsford. The sale consisted of 7 lots, one of which was the workhouse dining room which was situated in Pebble Lane. This lot was sold to a committee established to set up a British School. The building was subsequently used as a school with girls and boys taught separately. Indeed, they each had their own entrance to the school.

The decision to build a new workhouse turned out to be an ill-advised and expensive move as in 1833 Earl Grey, the Prime Minister, set up a Poor Law Commission to examine the working of the Poor Law System in Britain. In their report the Commission made many radical recommendations to Parliament. As a result, the great Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was passed.

This Act had significant ramifications for Aylesbury as under the Act parishes had to group together. So was formed the Aylesbury Union in July 1835. This accommodated the needs of 40 parishes and had an elected Board of Guardian of 48 members to oversee its operation. The population of the Union at the 1831 Census was 21,480 (Aylesbury's population was at the time 5,021).

In March 1841 the Guardians discussed erecting an additional building to be used as an infirmary and to carry out work to the existing premises. In 1842 the subject of building a new workhouse was met with considerable opposition and for a time the idea was abandoned. However the issue failed to fade away and on the 10th July 1842 it was noted that there was "great division" between Board members. By 29th July 1842 it was reported that the Board had reached an agreement to build a new workhouse at once.

On the 1st October and again on the 8th October 1842 the Bucks Gazette carried adverts calling on all persons wishing to sell about 5-8 acres of land

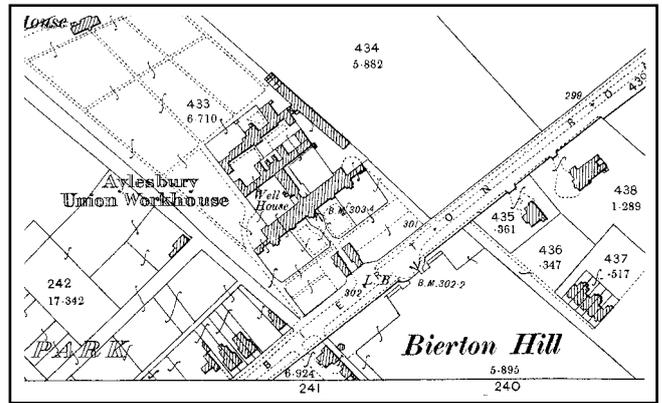
RULES & ORDERS

TO BE OBSERVED BY
The Poor of the Parish Workhouse of Aylesbury,
IN THE COUNTY OF BUCKS.

- I. That the Master and Mistress live in the House, and see that the following Rules be observed.
- II. Every Person in health shall rise by six o'clock the summer half year, and by seven the winter half year, and shall be employed in such labour as their respective age and ability will admit, and commence their work by six o'clock in the morning, and work till six o'clock at night, from Monday to Saturday; and from seven o'clock till dusk, from Saturday to Sunday, allowing half an hour for breakfast, one hour for dinner, and half an hour for supper; and any one refusing to work, shall for the first offence go without their next meal, and for the second offence be reported to the Overseers, that they may otherwise be punished.
- III. That all the poor in the House go to bed by eight o'clock the summer half year, and by seven o'clock the winter half year, and that all candles be put out by that time.
- IV. That the poor shall have their provisions in a clean and wholesome manner, their beds tightly right, their dinner at twelve, and their supper at six o'clock; that no waste be made, nor any provisions carried away; and that Grace shall be said before and after dinner, and none may depart until Grace is said; and their dinner three times a week to be hot meat and regulated properly cooked.
- V. That the House be swept from top to bottom every morning, and cleaned all over once a week, or as often as the Master and Mistress think necessary; and the windows be opened daily.
- VI. That none absent themselves from the House without leave, nor stay beyond the time allowed them, on pain of losing their next meal, or of some other punishment; nor may any one be admitted into the House without leave of the Overseers.
- VII. Any of the poor guilty of stealing, selling their provisions or clothing, or of drunkenness, quarrelling, quarrelling, fighting, or in any other way disturbing the peace of the House, or acting in any way unwary or abusive to the Master or Mistress, shall be punished with the utmost severity of the law.
- VIII. That all in the House who are able, and can be spared from the duties thereof, shall attend Church or some other Place of Worship twice every Sunday; and those who refuse or neglect to attend, or do not return as soon as Service is over, shall go without their next meal, or be punished in some other way, as the Overseers shall think proper.
- IX. No person shall be permitted to bring spirituous liquors into the House, or make in any part of the premises, except the hall. Those found transgressing, shall lose their next meal, or be otherwise punished.
- X. Workmen shall be allowed 2d. in every shilling they earn; Cooks 4d. per week; Dishes' Purses from the Workhouse 1/2d. per week per day, and tea in the afternoon.
- XI. Any of the poor acting in disobedience of the orders of the Master or Mistress, or in contempt of these Orders, shall be taken before a Magistrate, and punished as the law directs.
- XII. That these Orders be placed in the hall, dinner room, or in any other place that the Overseers may direct; and that they be read on a Sunday afternoon, once by the Master or Mistress, so that the poor may not plead ignorance of the same.
- XIII. If any of the poor are found defiling or destroying these Rules, they shall be punished by being led on a barrel and water only for two days.

JOHN KERSELEY FOWLER, } Churchwardens. ROBERT READ, } Overseers.
JAMFER JACKSON, }
WILLIAM HOMEMAYR, }

27th JANUARY, 1831.



1843 the Bucks Gazette carried an advert from the Board asking for tenders to build the new workhouse and the Gazette later reported that a Mr. Holman, a builder of London, had won the contract with the lowest bid of £7,350. In September 1844 the new workhouse, situated opposite the site on which the prison was to be built on the Bierton Road, was opened.

By 1925 the workhouse was officially known as Aylesbury Poor Law Institution and later as Tindal Hospital. The Board of Guardians was abolished on the 1st April 1930, their final meeting held on 9th April, and their responsibilities transferred to Bucks County Council. The Poor Law itself was ended by the passing of the National Assistance Act in 1947. Tindal House Hospital and Tindal General were united under the administration of the Aylesbury and District Hospital Management Committee on 5th July 1948.

in the immediate neighbourhood of Aylesbury, suitable for the site of the new Union workhouse, to come forward. No suitable land was found. It was reported on the 24th December 1842 that a Dr. Lee had offered 5 acres in Hartwell but there had been opposition and he had then offered 6 acres of land in Stone next to the Church.

By April 1843 the problem of the site had been resolved and the architect appointed. The workhouse was designed by Strehill Oakes Foden in collaboration with Assistant Poor Law Commissioner H. W. Parker. On the 29th April

