

3 Hayes

Admission of Paupers

Paupers are to be admitted into the workhouse in one of the following modes.

- a) By an order of the Board of Guardians signified in writing from the Clerk.
- b) By a provisional order in writing signed by an overseer, churchwarden or a relieving officer.
- c) By the Master of the workhouse without such order in case of an emergency.

THE CLOSE BRIDGE AND THE POOR LAW AND UNIONS

How It All Started

Prior to 1834 there were no national systems. The new Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 abolished outdoor relief to the able-bodied who, on applying for relief, were to be offered maintenance in a work house where lives were to be regulated and made less comfortable than if they had chosen to stay outside and fend for themselves. This was supposed to be a self-acting test of destitution. Only those in dire need would accept the workhouse rather than starvation. On entering the workhouse they lost all rights and privileges. Those who chose not to lose their rights became paupers. The overall responsibility for the Poor Law passed into the hands of the Poor Law Commissioners at Somerset House. Their rulings were transmitted to the Board of Guardians in different areas by assistant Poor Law Commissioners. The County was divided into Poor Law Unions, each of which had a Board of Guardians who were given complete control of Local Administrations Boards. It varied on how they ran their Unions. Some stuck to the rigid rules of the Law, some were more flexible. Boards of Unions were elected annually and each Guardian represented a constituent Parish within his Poor Law Union. The Unions in the North were far from pleasant, but to all accounts Unions in the South were more flexible in their management. In comparison with other Unions, Bridge was a model Union. As there were rich and poor parishes, the administration was good in some and not in others.

This gives the reader a rough idea of how Unions came into being. We will now transgress on to The Close at Bridge first known as Bridge Union.

The Building And Land

The land was brought from Lord Albert Conyngham by the Board of Guardians for the sum of £257.10s in 1835. Then a tender was put out and a Mr. J. F. Cozens, a Canterbury builder, was accepted for the construction of the building for the price of £4,376. A loan from the Government was taken up for £5,000.

The building took nine months to erect. In 1835 the first meeting of the Guardians took place. It was held in the White Horse Inn. The Guardians were joined by Sir Francis Head as Assistant Poor Law Commissioner for the East Kent area. There were three ex-officer Guardians plus twenty one Parish Guardians. The Parishes included Bridge, Ickham, Patricxbourne, Lower Harde, Kingston,

Harbledown, Waltham, Upper Harges, Bishopsbourne, Fordwich, Wickham, Adisham, Stodmarsh, Bekesbourne, Littlebourne, Nockington, Thanington, Womenowold, Westgate, Barham and Petham. Mr. Collard was elected Clerk of the Union at a salary of £40 per annum. Chairman was elected and a Mr. Richard Peckham of Bekesbourne won the vote. Mr. Nathaniel Maynard of Fordwich became the Deputy Chairman.

The Union was divided into two districts each of them had a receiving officer. Then the twenty one parishes were divided up into four districts, this was done for medical purposes.

It was agreed at the meeting that no more than 500 able-bodied persons should be accommodated at the Workhouse. They also accepted that one more parish (Chartham) should be included - the total now being twenty two. A doctor was engaged on a salary of £150 per annum. A Master of the Workhouse was appointed at a salary of £80 per annum, this was exclusive of living and candles. Mr. and Mrs. Weeks were their names and they short lived their position resigning towards the end of 1835. The Guardians then had to find a new Master and Matron. In early 1836 Thomas and Maria Colb were appointed with an annual salary of £80 and £20 respectively. They did better with two wages. A schoolmistress came next at £32 per annum; a porter at 10/- per week; a medical officer at £50 per annum; 24 staff were engaged including 3 cooks, 1 nurse for eight wards, 2 attendants - one for girls and one for boys - both being women.

The Workhouse was constructed to accommodate 200 inmates but that number was not reached in the early stages. Only 100 iron bedsteads were required. Inmates were transferred from one Workhouse to another, thus arriving from various districts to Bridge.

The diet of these inmates was to be a common diet for the Workhouses and Poorhouses alike throughout East Kent.

Ablebodied men and women: Breakfast and Supper - bread and cheese or butter, 6oz bread for men 5oz for women with 1oz cheese or $\frac{1}{2}$ oz of butter. Dinner for two days consisted of suet pudding and vegetables, 1lb for men 10 ozs for women. For one day 1lb of meat pudding for men 10ozs for women. For four days, bread and cheese 7ozs bread and 1oz of cheese.

Cost Per Head

1931	..	..	..	..	17s.
1933	..	..	..	..	20s.7d.
1935	..	..	..	..	20s.1d.
1937	..	..	..	..	25s.4d.
1939	..	..	..	..	26s.8d.

Bills Per Quarter

<u>Christmas 1912</u>					<u>Christmas 1930</u>					
Baker	£5.16.3d.	Baker	..	..	..	..	£2.18.6d.
Butcher	£6.2.3d.	Butcher	..	..	..	..	£3.1.11½d.
Grocer	£18.5.6d.	Grocer	..	..	..	..	£2.4.5d.
Milk	£2.4.9¾d.	Milk	..	..	..	..	£3.4.1¼d.
<u>Weekly</u>					Fishmonger	..	..	..	..	£0.7.0d.
Breweries	£0.11.9d.	Gas	..	..	..	..	£6.3.10d.
Vegetables	£4.13.4d.	Drugs	..	..	..	..	£10.9.5d.
					Ironmonger	..	..	..	..	£11.5.0d.
					Builder..	..	..	..	..	£6.4.7d.
					Blacksmith	..	..	..	..	£2.4.11d.
					Furnishes	..	..	..	..	£7.10.0d.
					Draper	..	..	..	..	£22.2.6d.
					Coal	..	..	..	..	£28.18.0d.

As one can see the prices are up but so are the services i.e. Coal, Drugs etc.

Rates

I90I	½ year in Bridge Union	£7.16.8½d.
I91I	.. .. .	£10.18.0d.
I914	.. .. .	£21.16.0d.
I92I	.. .. .	£43.12.0d.
I926	.. .. .	£51.00.45d. 45.0d.

Changes And Plans

- I849 Plans for Cooking House, Porters Room, Chapel.
- I854 Grand new plan for Workhouse.
- I860 Lockup House, Lunacy House.
- I866 New Dying Room.
- I869 New Vagrants Room, Stable.
- I876 Minor alterations.
- I900 New Vagrants Ward (closed 1932).

Payments

Payment required from a resident who has property which has been sold is assessed and the highest amount is £59 per week.

Pension Only

This will be taken and £3 given back for pocket money.

Menu

1979

Breakfast	Bread and Butter, Porridge, Marmalade, Tea
Lunch	Sausage, Egg and Chips, Jam Sponge and Custard.
Tea	Welsh Rarebit, Cake and Tea.

For Old People: The same for men and women except for 1oz of tea and milk for breakfast and supper.

For Children: Bread and milk for breakfast and supper and such proportions as the Board of Guardians decide for the remainder of the diet.

For The Sick: What was ordered by the Doctor.

The running costs for Bridge Union came from the various parishes, thus bringing in rich parishes to pay more. Bridge paid £27 per annum as against Barham £53 and Stodmarsh £6. The average was £22, so you can see that Bridge paid over the average.

Besides being Guardians of the Union, they looked ^{after} upon outside relief. In 1836 they expressed the following views, "Any fixed scale of relief is directly hostile to the principle of the Poor Law Amendment Act. No pauper should be able to safely calculate the amount of relief he should receive and set store by it. Instead it should fluctuate so much that he could never calculate what he was to receive and therefore come to realize he had no certain support," although this was said the sums set were -

For a man with wife and six children	10/- per week
For a man with wife	5/- per week
For old people	2/6 per week

I will not go on with this as it involves quite a bit more. This was done for illustration. What about the man with 1,2,3,4 or 5 children? His bad luck! The Guardians kept a tight control over expenditure. Everything was put out to tender, (this is done today), and most ominously for the supply of coffins.

In 1870 there were proposed alterations to the Workhouse and this caused quite a debate. A Mr. Lake was against this matter on the grounds of that the district could not meet the extra charges. Also he would have liked to see the old people and children given more consideration. A Mr. Dering (who has a road in the village named after him) said the inmates of Bridge Union were inclassifiable. The late Poor Law Inspector was very desirous of improvements. The Poor Law Inspector who proceeded Mr. Lanley thought all the residents should be taken to a place of safety and that the Workhouse should be burnt to the ground. In 1979 there are a few people who think this way too!

Extensions to the Workhouse were undertaken in 1872 consisting of new

casual wards and a stable and coach house.

There were Court cases. Two men in the Vagrant Ward of Bridge Union broke all the windows. The men had travelled the country looking for work. They were admitted by an order for the night but as no food was included in the nights lodging, they broke the windows. The Master of the Union stated that he was only allowed to give food in cases of extreme destitution. These men had walked 26 miles that day without food. They were sentenced to be imprisoned for one week. If they had received bread it would have been more. The Magistrate told the Guardians of Bridge Union that he did not approve of their methods. An able-bodied pauper refused to work so he was given a months imprisonment. The reason why he did not work was because he was blind. What would we have done today?

January 1st 1876. As before the inmates of Bridge Union had a dinner of roast beef and plum pudding given by the Marquis of Conyngham. Gifts were given out.

The Birth Registrar

The first registered birth at Bridge Union was on the 27th February 1836. It was an illegitimate child. The mother belonged to the Parish of Bishopsbourne. In the records of such births, the baptism is also noted, this one was on 23rd March 1836. Noted in the year book of Bridge Rural District, this was not done, only the parents name, the time, place and witness.

Prior to the transfer of Poor Law functions to the County Council, it was the responsibility of each board of Guardians to provide for children requiring care apart from their own parents either by maintaining them or boarding them out to foster homes.

Lunatics

There were just a few questions to be answered and these were 'Just Attack, Epilepsy, Suicide, and Danger to Others. A girl of 15 years was admitted to Bridge Union on these facts. She was classed as an idiot because her mother was an idiot and that she had cried since birth. This was one of the Public Assistance jobs to remove children from Workhouses and to sort out the lunatics. Children sought to find their parents.

Vagrancy

Under the Public Assistance Committee, to stay the night cost 1/6 for casuals and 2/- a day for the aged and infirm. The casual ward rate dropped to 1/- per night and 9d. a night for the aged and infirm in 1932 and 1937. As a result of

action taken by the Joint Vagrancy Act Committee, the Bridge wards closed in 1932.

In 1930 the County Medical Officer from the Public Assistance Committee made some suggestions as to its various Unions. Bridge Union was recommended to be closed. Result - this was never found practicable. But no major improvements were done. Also in 1929 the whole of the Union was looked at in a Survey recommending closure.

Visits from outside bodies had as far not taken place but in 1937 outsiders began to take an interest. This might have been due to the fact that the areas of Dover, Eastry, Blean and Thanet became South East Kent Area. It must be noted that Bridge Union had a hospital block and a maternity ward which were on the upper floors.

In 1948 dramatic changes took place. The County Councils stepped in and Bridge Union was the second Union to be retained. Had it not been for the War Romney Marsh, Bridge and Strood Institutions would have been closed. There was no alternative accommodation (there cannot be found any alternative accommodation in 1979 for the residents). Their continued use must not therefore, be taken as criticism of the Public Assistance Committee because at one time they also thought it was a waste of money to keep them in good repair. Today, 1979, we are still trying to keep them in good repair, the repair bill for Bridge is never ending.

It must be pointed out that to have run Bridge Union and other Unions, the labour or workforce were the inmates of these buildings i.e. the gardens were cultivated by institutor and tramp labour. The domestic work was also undertaken and the laundry, although supervisory staff were paid. No payment was allowed as pocket money until the Poor Law Amendment of 1938 and then only those over 65 years of age. Not forgetting that two world wars had taken place putting back any sort of improvements. Another tobacco allowance was given to the older inmates and also to workers and those with unpleasant tasks. Cigarettes were issued to women smokers in 1935 or $\frac{1}{2}$ lb of sweets per week. Administration and organization under the County Council continued to improve a little still being on a tight reign bearing in mind that the war of 1939 - 1945 had not long passed. Plans came and went but there was never enough money. The hospital stayed in operation until 1970 when this was closed, and the whole of the building became an Old Peoples Home. In 1963 alterations took place as to the sanitary arrangements, they were improved and brought up to date. Still doing some today. In

1944, fire precautions were done with self-closing doors and fire escapes but they are still used as well as the wooden cat-walks. In 1978 the Fire Officer announced that it was dangerous and unsafe — .

This year - 1979 - the Home now has 64 mentally frail residents as those who were with this house in the early days are now departed, although one resident of 12 years standing is still with them.

There are 58 staff, care and domestic, including a Matron, one Deputy Matron and two Assistant Matrons, also two clerks in the office. This might seem to be a great deal of people but as they run their own laundry and each resident is unable to do anything for themselves everyone is needed.

The residents enter the establishment through a Doctor and a Social Worker who has gone into their case to find out whether it is safe for them to live in the community. No way can they be kept in these establishments unless they want to. Unlike the old days, they are still encouraged to keep their individuality and self respect, infact sometimes this is what they need, someone to drag them back up. Their pensions are taken but pocket money by law is returned at about £3. If they do not require this the money is placed on their bank card to be spent as they wish. They can come and go as they please, going to the shops etc. But at the same time some mentally frail residents requirements are purchased without the resident leaving the premises. Everthing possible is done for them including outings and film shows every fortnight. Visitors are allowed in any-time just like being in ones' own home.

The building itself had not chnged in appearance, it still looks like Bridge Union. Inside, no matter what one does the old Union feeling prevails. The doors are not wide enough for wheelchairs and the dormitory way of sleeping still continues. Draughts through the windows still comes likes a cutting knife and the central heating system is old and decrepid resulting in much heat loss. There is a lot of wasted ground where vegetables could be grown and supply the home (this could be done by the trainee gardeners of the County Council). The Kitchen is in the centre of the buildings so that means that the meals are brought round on a trolley, getting cold before they reach the units. The units are too large and badly need decorating. There is a television on every unit which everyone sits round but some don't want to watch it anyway. The men have to go through the ladies dormitories to get to their bedrooms or go outside and across the yard.

Tudor Times (16th and 17th Centuries). Parish workhouses.

1795 The Speenhamland System similar to Social Security but not nationally organized. Money came from rates.

1834 Poor Law Report. Middle-class given the Vote. Complained about supporting the inadequate. Poor Law Commission set up, it failed to look at the causes of unemployment and poverty.

1847 Poor Law Boards set up. Commissioner was a member of Government. Lacked this previously.

1871 Local Government Board.

1894 Local Government Act appointment of Relieving Officer.

1895 Royal Commission for the aged poor, result - limited old age pension in 1908. Age limit 70 years.

1846 Bath and Washhouse Act.

1848 Public Health Act, not compulsory.

1871 Local Government Act. One minister responsible for Poor Law. Public Health.

1875 Public Health Act. Sewage drains, refuse, water supply etc.

* 1905-9 Poor Law Commission. Infant Welfare Centres. Health Visitors. Drop in infant mortality.

1911 National Insurance Act.

1919 Ministry of Health. Poor Law went to Home Office.

* 1905 Poor Law found 14,000 children in mixed workhouses. 200,000 - 300,000 receiving assistance on any one day.

1930 Poor Law children under Education Committee also those who went through Courts and approved schools.

1945 Monkton Report (Dennis O'Neil).

1948 Local Health and Elderly and Handicapped.

1963 Childrens Act. Prevention of children needing residential care.

1966 Social Security taking over.

1969 Childrens Act. No segregation of delinquent children and others.

1970 Local Government Social Services Act. Joining all Welfare services performed by local Authority.

1974 Reorganization of the Health Service to Area Hospital Boards.

1979 Utter Chaos.

Most of the residents are Victorian and don't approve. Most of the washrooms are next to the kitchens.

Staff rooms are none as such, there is nowhere for them to go and relax for dinner or tea breaks (this is because most of the places allocated have once been occupied by the residents). Here it must be pointed out that the staff at The Close are good and would be much happier and healthier if they had more time to work at a slower rate. Owing to the make up of the Home this cannot be done at all.

One may ask a question. Money is being spent in thousands of pounds on this building while it is always under closure. Why not make a stand. The land which The Close stands on is large enough to build a new Home at the back of the existing building. A building could be erected onto the remainder to help with the cost of old peoples flats.

My personal view - I only hope that soon someone in the County makes a definite plan regarding Bridge Union.

B. Hayes
1978

A new Close was opened.