

Passages in Village Life, 1640-1820

Most of the brief narratives that follow were first published under the pseudonym Canities (meaning grey-haired) in the Hook Norton Newsletter between 1987 and 1989. They were written by the late Rev. Ralph Mann, who gave permission for their republication here. He originally wrote under a pseudonym because, as he said in 2014 shortly before his death, "I didn't want people to think I was a busy-body incomer interfering in local affairs!" Though Canities on occasion invented dialogue and let his imagination run free on some detail, the stories are well-grounded in the archival sources and convey the essence of historical situations and experiences quite graphically.

To these miniature treasures we have added one unusual contribution by another pen. In 1925 Margaret Dickins published a similarly imaginative piece in the Brymbo Workers Magazine, describing a day in the life of the village in 1774. It appears here in its chronological place, pages 14-19. We are grateful to Rob Woolley for drawing it to our attention.

1643: Henry Foster Slept Here

When news reached London in August 1643 that King Charles had laid siege to Gloucester, a great wave of indignation swept the capital, and three new auxiliary regiments of infantry were recruited to join the two existing regiments of Trained Bands to form a Brigade to save Gloucester. London was for the Parliament and the people and the protestant religion; the king, with his catholic cavaliers and country gentry was based on Oxford. To get to Gloucester from London, the Brigade would have to cross royalist territory. The Red and Blue Regiments of Trained Bands consisted largely of teenage apprentices and young journeymen, equipped with pikes and muskets and, if they were lucky, a fine new sword from the Hounslow Sword Factory. In their knapsacks they carried enough bread and cheese for one week.

For Henry Foster, a young man serving Col. Manwaring in the Red Regiment, it was a great adventure as they set out on 23rd August 1643 to march across uncharted England, where there were places with strange names like Ano or Stow the Old; he kept a diary of their daily marches. At Aylesbury on 30th August, the Brigade met up with the main Parliamentary Army, and the Lord General Essex reviewed all his troops. "It was a goodly and glorious sight to see the whole Army of Horse and Foot together", Henry wrote. The following night the Brigade was quartered on Souldern, and the Army was nearby at Aynho. They had been on the march ten days and their rations had been eaten up: "we were very much scanted of Victualls in this place", wrote Henry.

The next day, Saturday 2nd September 1643, they marched through Deddington and across country to Hook Norton, where the whole Brigade of 5,000 men was billeted. Every room, outhouse, barn, hovel and stable must have been crowded, and all the larders and ale-barrels emptied overnight. News reached them that Essex's army had had a skirmish with the Cavaliers under Lord Wilmot, and some killed, but the royalists had withdrawn to Oxford. Early on the Sunday morning, the Brigade reformed and set off to march to Chipping Norton, passing Essex's army bivouacked on the Great Common alongside the Worcester Road, and then on to Oddington. The housewives of Hook Norton surveyed with despair their depleted stocks.

On the cold, damp evening of September 5th, the Army reached the crest of Prestbury Hill above Cheltenham, and looking westward could see in the distance the evening light on the Severn and the great tower of Gloucester cathedral. Essex fired a salute with his cannons, and the 23-year old Col. Massey in Gloucester fired an acknowledgment. King Charles, waterlogged amongst the desolation of his siege works, saw the exchange and despaired. Overnight, the royalist army crept away, leaving fields of mud and heaps of burning refuse. Gloucester was saved for Parliament. "Can we go home now?" asked one of the royal princes, Charles or James. "We have no home", the King replied.

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Village Newsletter, 12: 4, July 1987

1664: Baptist Persecution

It is one of the mysteries of our local history that by 1655 a large, well-organized Baptist congregation existed in a remote village like Hook Norton. Baptists had appeared as a breakaway sect in London in the early seventeenth century, but they did not make headway until the breakdown of official religious controls in the political crisis that resulted in the outbreak of civil war in 1642. The victorious Parliament tried unsuccessfully to establish an official Presbyterian Church, but this was soon replaced by the attempt under Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate (1653-1658) to create a national religious framework which allowed local Protestant congregations to choose their own ministers and style of worship. Regarded even in that era of political and religious experiment as amongst the more extreme radical elements, the Baptist churches tended to grow mainly in larger towns, but they clearly found a fertile soil in a poor, deprived village like Hook Norton which had been notoriously ill-served by the Anglican Church in previous years.

Following the restoration of King Charles II in 1660 came the restoration of the episcopal Anglican Church; those who refused to use the revised Book of Common Prayer re-issued in the autumn of 1662 became the original "non-conformists" and Acts were passed by Parliament to suppress them. As a result of the Conventicle Act of 1664, dissenting congregations were liable to be disrupted by the local militia under warrant from the Justices of the Peace. Hook Norton Baptist Church at that time had a joint pastorate of James Wilmot and Charles Archer of Swalcliffe. A hostile informer in Swerford tipped off the local justices about the time and place of the Baptist meeting in Hook Norton, and the service was duly interrupted by a group of part-time soldiers who arrested the pastors and carried them off to prison in Oxford Castle. Although they were later released, this was only the beginning of a period of persecution that was to last for eight years.

Between 1664 and 1672, non-conformists were repeatedly persecuted. James Wilmot and Charles Archer, the Baptist pastors of Hook Norton, were again arrested and imprisoned for a time in Witney Gaol. James Wilmot was fined £20. Though he was a yeoman and a maltster, he was unable to find a sum of this order, equivalent to several thousand pounds in today's prices. The magistrate thereupon ordered

that his furniture should be seized, and, when this was valued at less than £20, the property of Humphrey Gillett, a woolman and another committed Hook Norton Baptist, was likewise taken to make up the difference.

The furniture was then taken by waggon to the Wednesday market at Chipping Norton, and for several successive market days the Town Cryer was employed to encourage purchasers. "Oyez! Oyez! House clearance sale! Furniture and effects of the rascally Baptists of Hook Norton offered for only £20! Recently fallen off the back of a waggon!"—or words to that effect. But Chipping Norton was a notoriously Puritan town, and there were no takers.

Finally, the furniture was re-loaded, taken by waggon to Swerford, and dumped at the home of the man who had originally informed the magistrate—perhaps Henry Beezley the Rector of Swerford, who was fanatically hostile to dissenters—but he was similarly unable to dispose of it. Ultimately, Wilmot's and Gillett's furniture was returned to Hook Norton, and a proclamation was issued that anyone could have the lot for a pound. At this, one of James Wilmot's friends came forward, repurchased the furniture, and handed it all back to the Baptist pastor and his friend Gillett.

James Wilmot and Charles Archer received civil treatment in Witney Gaol, and there was plenty of congenial company there since they shared accommodation with other like-minded dissenters from north Oxfordshire. Warm Christian friendships were established amongst the young men in prison, and at least two of their fellow-sufferers - Josiah Diston and Joseph Davis of Chipping Norton - generously remembered James Wilmot's family when they came to make their wills many years later. When James Wilmot was released from Witney Gaol, he soon found himself in trouble again. Excommunicated by the Anglican Church - a somewhat irrelevant penalty, one would think - he was warned that several writs for his arrest had been issued, and was forced to go into hiding.

However, Wilmot found himself back in Oxford Prison for at least one further stretch. His father, a yeoman of Hook Norton and a staunch Anglican who had never accepted his son's radical ideas, decided to ask for clemency. He made his way

over to Cornwell Manor, the home of Sir Thomas Penyston, the magistrate who had issued the writ, and petitioned for his son's release.

"Let him rot in gaol!" Penyston curtly replied.

"That was what one of your fellow magistrates said last time", replied Wilmot's father, "but now he himself is dead".

"Even though he be dead", said Penyston, "yet his work shall not die".

James Wilmot remained in prison.

Henry Thorp, the gaoler of Oxford Castle, was very harsh towards his nonconformist prisoners, forbidding them to pray together. Discovering them about to say grace before eating a meal, he rushed into the cell in a great rage to prevent them, shouting at them, "What! Are you preaching over your victuals?"

When Charles II, for personal reasons, decided to issue a Declaration of Indulgence in 1672, releasing all the nonconformists held in prison in various towns in his kingdom, it was warmly welcomed by several hundred prisoners, including John Bunyan in Bedford gaol. Wilmot and Archer's names are not included on the Declaration list, so presumably they had already been released.

Persecution of dissenters proved to be counterproductive. In the thirty years leading up to the Toleration Act of 1689, nonconformist churches grew numerically stronger, and their faith stood firm. Hook Norton Baptist chapel had a substantial congregation by then, drawn from a wide catchment area extending some fifteen miles to include both Banbury and Chipping Norton.

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(First appeared in the Newsletter, 13: 6, November 1988, and 14: 1, January 1989, in a slightly different form. DJR)

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1670: John Skinner Nuncupates

In July 1670, John Skinner, a yeoman of Hook Norton, was very ill. A message was sent to the Rev. Edward Jennings, Minister of Hook Norton, asking him to come to John Skinner's house at once. Coming to the door, Edward Jennings called out in a loud voice, "Peace be to this house, and to all that dwell in it." He was ushered into the dying man's bedroom, and could see at once that John Skinner had not much longer to live. Friends and neighbours had gathered there, including James Prue who seemed to be in charge of the situation, but of John Skinner's sons and daughters there was no sign.

Opening his Book of Common Prayer, Edward Jennings began the service for the Visitation of the Sick: "Remember not, Lord, our iniquities, nor the iniquities of our forefather" The responses were given firmly by James Prue, and almost inaudibly by John Skinner. After a recitation of the Apostle's Creed, to which Skinner replied, "All this I steadfastly believe", Edward Jennings began to enquire whether Skinner had anything on his conscience. "Have you forgiven everyone who has offended you? Have you done injury to any man? Have you made your will?"

At this point, John Skinner shook his head. He was far too weak to write anything now, and in any case there was little time. "Tell us what you want", said Jennings, "and we will write it down for you". And bit by bit, John Skinner managed to make his meaning clear. It was more than three years before Edward Jennings came to write down what Skinner had said, but on 14 October 1693 he recorded the nuncupative—spoken—will of John Skinner:

Memorandum that att or about the month of July in the year of our Lord God one thousand six heindred and seaventie John Skinner of Hooknorton in the Countie of Oxon yeoman beeing weake in body butt of of perfecte mind and memorie and haveing an Intent and mind to make his will and dispose of his Estate did make and declare by word of mouth his Last will and testament nuncupative in these words following or the same in Effect Vizt I give all my Estate unto Sarah Croker the wife of William Croker of Hooknorton aforesaid Gent incase my Children doe nott come to Hooknorton aforesaid to demand

itt, then my will is that the said Sarah Croker shall deliver upp to my two Sonnes the summ of fowerteen pounds to be devided equally between them and fortie shillings to my Eldest daughter, and gold ring to my youngest daughter. All which words or the same in Effect he uttered and declared in the presence of severall witnesses who in testimony of the truth of the premisses have hereunto subscribed their names this 14th day of October Anno Domini 1693.

Edward Jennings signed his name with professional flourish; James Prue made his mark "P" firmly; and the will was proved.

I wonder whether any of John Skinner's four children ever claimed their inheritance from Sarah Croker?

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Village Newsletter, 14: 4, July 1989

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1745: The Bare-faced Hussy

There was an exceptionally large congregation at St Peter's Church on Sunday, 14th July 1745. Attendance at Morning Prayer was compulsory for everyone, but there were always those who managed to find a plausible excuse for staying at home. But even the most habitual malingerer dragged himself out of bed for what promised to be a memorable occasion.

The Rev^d. Richard Bryan, M.A., the 30-year old curate who had had charge of the parish for the past three years, began with the familiar verse from Scripture: "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." The service then proceeded with mounting excitement until the end of the Te Deum; at which point silence fell and all eyes turned to the vestry door as the Churchwardens, Anthony Lampett and Robert Barnes[?], holding their staves of office before them, led out a self-conscious young couple, dressed in a bizarre fashion.

First came John Smith, wearing white sheet and carrying a white rod in his hand. Behind him came Mary Clark “in along white sheet down from her shoulders to her ankles bare-faced bare-legged and bare-footed with a long white rod in her hand.” The church wardens guided them to the open space in front of the pulpit where the whole congregation could see them, and Richard Bryan the curate left his stall to stand in front of them. Then, addressing each of them in turn, he ordered them to repeat after him, loudly and clearly, phrase by phrase:

*Good people – Whereas to the great Displeasure of Almighty God and the Offence of this neighbourhood I have committed the foul Crime of Fornication and stand Convict thereof by my own Confession: I am therefore according to Order of Court come hither to make this my Acknowledgement: I confess my Fault and am sorry for the same. Moreover asking forgiveness of Almighty God and promising by his Assistance not to commit the like Offence any more and that he may give me Grace so to do, I desire you all to join with me in prayer to him for the Help of Holy Spirit.*¹

The curate then brought the congregation to their knees, and self-righteously they all joined in repeating the familiar Lord’s Prayer – “and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them”

Mary Clark and John Smith had indeed been thoroughly humiliated. Mary had come to Hook Norton as Mary Rider to marry Richard Clark in 1728. They had two daughters, Mary and Hannah, and then, ten years after their wedding, Richard Clark died and was buried at Hook Norton on 15th May 1738. Early death - Richard cannot have been more than forty - was frequent in those days, and his widow would be expected to remarry: but Mary Clark did not marry again. Seven years later, she was perceived to be pregnant.

¹ There seems to be no record that these were the precise words that Mary Clark used in 1745, but they were those used by Mary Beale in a similar case in Hook Norton in 1759.

Such a situation was not uncommon, although it will have given rise to a certain amount of self-righteous gossip in the village; usually the father's identity would have been well-known, and public opinion was a powerful incentive for him to marry the woman so that the child could be born in wedlock. But in the case of Mary Clark, no-one came forward to make an "honest woman" of her, and in the summer of 1745 she gave birth to twin boys, baptised on 9th June as John and Edward Clark. In the eighteenth century twins rarely survived infancy, and illegitimate twins were at a double disadvantage. Perhaps it was in expectation that the infants would die that the parish officials delayed taking action. Eight days after the christening little John Clark was buried, but little Edward must have been unusually robust and was a survivor.

The Overseers of the Poor of Hook Norton, Robert Bricknill and John Goodwin, always watchful to avoid any additional burden on the parish poor rate, were anxious to identify the father and make him financially responsible for Mary Clark's surviving child. On 29th June 1745 the Churchwardens and Overseers took Mary to Richard Wycomb, the Justice of the Peace, and there, upon oath, she confessed that the father of the child was one John Smith, a yeoman of Hook Norton. The parish officers lost no time. On the same day John Smith was apprehended and brought before the magistrate, together with a relative - probably a brother - Robert Smith. Richard Wycomb interrogated John Smith, and then wrote out a formal document or Bond setting out the facts of the situation: "Mary Clarke of Hooknorton ... Widow, hath lately been delivered of a Male Bastard Child within the said Parish of Hooknorton, which Child is now liveing and likely to become chargeable to the said Parish of Hooknorton". John Smith signed and sealed the document in the presence of witnesses (Richard Hiden and Charles Brown), binding himself to forfeit £40 to the parish if he failed to cover all the expenses incurred by Mary Clark and to provide adequate maintenance and education for his surviving son. To ensure that he did not abscond, Robert Smith was bound with him as a surety. Mary Clark's financial position at least was now secure, but her ordeal was not yet over.

Misconduct of this kind, common enough among the labouring poor, could not be countenanced in members of the respectable yeoman class. The Churchwardens, making their official report on the parish to the Archdeacon of Oxford, decided to 'present' Mary Clark and John Smith, so that the Archdeacon could punish them for immorality. Hook Norton was to have rather a dismal record for bringing such cases before the ecclesiastical court; twelve years earlier Elianor Bye had endured a similar ordeal. The penance imposed by the Archdeacon was exemplary, and was intended to create maximum psychological discomfiture. Normally the man and woman were required to appear in church on separate occasions, but on this occasion Mary Clark and John Smith were sentenced to stand together. (The penance cannot have been as effective as the Archdeacon had intended, for while John Smith and Mary Clark were undergoing these indignities, Richard Harwood and Elizabeth Haynes were themselves creating a situation for which, nine months later, they would be sentenced to a similar humiliating penance).

John Smith did not marry Mary Clark. However, there was at least one person who took pity on her for, four months later, on 19 November 1745, Thomas Clemnes (Clemens?) married Mary Clark in St. Peter's Church, and took her and the three children, Mary, Hannah and baby Edward, away from the village with such unhappy memories.

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(This story first appeared in the Village Newsletter, 13: 3, May 1988. In Mr Mann's historical notes, which he gave to the Village Archive, there appears a draft of a slightly different, somewhat more graphic version. I have taken the liberty of running the two together to produce the above account. DJR)

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1769: Was This A **Ing Record?**

In 1769, Hook Norton experienced a curious epidemic of profanity, which brought three of its residents before the assembled Justices at the Oxford Quarter Sessions. Apparently, it all started on 31st January when Thomas Gregory, a magistrate,

convicted Robert Powel of Hook Norton of swearing forty profane oaths.² Three weeks later, on 21st February, Alexander Hirons of Hook Norton was likewise convicted of swearing forty-five profane oaths. Hirons was a victualler and Powel was an excise officer, so it would be reasonable to guess that the incidents occurred in one of the inns, and may have arisen out of some dispute over the payment of excise on home-brewed ale. Presumably both Powel and Hirons had an extensive and fluent vocabulary, though it is not altogether surprising that the innkeeper managed to win on points. However, the following week, on 27th February 1769, Thomas Gregory convicted Richard Hitchman, a labourer, of swearing twenty-nine profane oaths, and all three culprits were then presented at the Quarter Sessions that Easter.

A fertile imagination can re-create the scene. Did they repeat themselves at all, or was this an orgy of wide-ranging blasphemy and obscenity? Was there someone sitting quietly in the bar, carefully counting the cuss-words? Was their language solemnly repeated by a witness in the presence of Thomas Gregory the magistrate, who then wrote it all down, word for word, in a formal deposition? Presumably, even if it was just a joke, there were at least some who felt that the whole thing had gone too far, and that the culprits must be punished. Unfortunately, the records do not tell us what punishment was imposed, but it is likely to have been a fine, payable to the poor of the village.

Or was this an eighteenth century fund-raising activity—a “sponsored swear”—that got out of hand? Perhaps our archives have uncovered an old Hooky custom which could profitably be revived today!

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(*Newsletter*, 12: 6, November 1987)

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² Ralph Mann’s notes on the Archdeacon’s records show that two years earlier, in June 1767, Robert Powell had been compelled to apologise publicly in Church after Morning Prayer for calling William Tredwell “the son of a whore”.

1437-1887: The Cherry Fair

In 1437, the Earl of Suffolk obtained a charter for a weekly market and two annual fairs to be held in Hoggenorton: similar charters were issued at the same time for Eynesham, Henle-super-Thames and Chorlebury. By this charter, the earl was given the right to charge a toll on those who came to trade, and in many cases—but obviously not here—the charter was a significant step in the growth of a market town. The weekly market had to compete against well-established markets in Rollright (1269), Banbury (1330) and Chipping Norton (1331), but the greater economic strength of Banbury and Chippy squeezed out the markets at Rollright and Hooky.

The two fairs, however, survived. The summer fair was held appropriately on St. Peter's Day, 29 June, and the winter fair on St. Hugh's Day, 17 November. Fairs were important occasions, attracting farmers from a wide area who came to sell sheep, cattle and horses. Other produce was also sold, and the summer fair came to be known as the “Cherry Fair”; Miss Dickins remembered that many cherry trees once grew in East End. Fairs also generated other activity: the inns and alehouses did good business; domestic servants and farm workers were hired; travelling people came to deal in horses; and pedlars, quacks and cheap-jacks tried to take advantage of the credulity of country folk.

In 1747 there was a deliberate but unsuccessful attempt to suppress one of the fairs. But the tradition that had grown up over three centuries was strong, and a fair could not easily be discontinued. Indeed, when in 1752 Parliament removed eleven days from the calendar in order to bring Britain into line with the rest of the world, Hook Norton retaliated by adding eleven days to the date of the winter fair, bringing it to 28th November. (They had the excellent example of the Chancellor of the Exchequer who likewise added eleven days to the end of the financial year, moving it from 25 March to 5 April).

In 1792, Owen's definitive *New Book of Fair'* recorded the two fairs in Hook Norton, but in the following year *Jackson's Oxford Journal* carried an advertisement:

The Fair called the Cherry Fair held at Hook Norton on June 29th will be discontinued. In future.... it will be held on the second Tuesday after May 12th annually.

It is not clear why the date was to be changed, nor who was behind this advertisement, but there was evidently considerable local opposition to the change—perhaps from the cherry growers? On May 16th 1795 they tried again:

Notice is hereby given, to all Gentlemen Graziers, Dealers and others, that the FAIR formerly held at Hook Norton ... on the Twenty-ninth Day of June, will, in future, be held on the Second Tuesday after the Twelfth Day of May, for the buying and selling of all sorts of Cattle. There will be convenient Pens for Sheep, and complete Stalling for Tradesmen.

Don't you believe it! On 13th June 1795 came the response:

Notice is hereby given, that the FAIR formerly held on the TWENTY-NINTH day of JUNE at HOOK NORTON... will be continued on That Day, and not to be disannulled by any Advertisement or any other Means whatever.

GOD SAVE THE KING.

They won. In 1869 Webster's Directory records the two Hook Norton Fairs on 29 June and 28 November. But the character of fairs was changing; the cheap-jacks were still there, but amusements and pickpockets had taken over from the more serious business of hiring and selling. The Hook Norton fairs were in decline.

There was one last attempt to revive the Cherry Fair after the railway had been opened to Banbury, and in 1887 the *Banbury Guardian* recorded that "this village presented the appearance it did in olden times when fairs and markets were held here". The attempt failed. The next year the government made a thorough enquiry into which fairs were still held, and their report, published in 1889, shows that Hook Norton fairs had disappeared.

What about reviving our Cherry Fair? On 29th June, of course!

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(Newsletter, 13: 1, January 1988)

1774: A Critical Year in the Life of the Town

Let us consider Hook Norton in 1774. I take that date because it was a very important date here. In that year the Common Lands of what was called the Parish and Liberties of Hook Norton and Southrop, were enclosed, and settled legally on their proprietors. I must just point out first, that this place is really two villages though only one Parish. More than six hundred years ago, Southrop which means "the south village", is mentioned, and as late as Mr Rushton's time [Rector, 1841-1881] people who were married or buried from the south side of the brook, are entered in the registers as from Southrop. There is one entry where Mr Rushton has first entered Hook Norton, and then crossed it out and put Southrop, which shows what importance he attached to the difference.

When you go up South Hill for a walk, and see those great, wild hedges, where the blackberries grow so freely, you probably think that they must always have been there. Should you be surprised to hear that 150 years ago [now 240 years ago] there was not a hedge between Chipping Norton and Banbury? The whole countryside was wild, unenclosed land, in the remoter parts covered with furze and thorns, but nearer the villages cultivated in small patches by a great number of different people. Have you ever noticed that nearly every house in Hook Norton [in 1925] has some sort of shed or barn attached to it? Why is that? It is because nearly everybody in the village had a bit of land and grew his own corn, which he had to store. Beside the arable land, there was pasture which was grazed by all/ in various proportions. People had what was called common rights, a man had perhaps one cow common, that is, he had the right to turn out one cow. Or he had common rights for so many sheep. There is an interesting survival of this custom in Oxford still. As you go in by train, you can see, on the right Port Meadow all dotted with stray horses and cows, turned out by their respective owners, who have the rights to graze the Common because they are Freemen of Oxford. Just in the same way the Townsman of Hook Norton had their common rights 150 [240] years ago. Another right people had, was to cut furze, which was much used for fuel when there were no railways to bring coal.

In 1774 the inhabitants of Hook Norton had come to the conclusion that it would be wise to have the land properly enclosed, so that it could be better cultivated. To

do this they had to get up a petition to Parliament, and get an act passed, after which a Commission was appointed to manage the business. The land was surveyed by two surveyors from different places, and valued by two valuers, also unconnected with the place. These valuers and commissioners had to take a solemn oath that they would carry out their duties "impartially, truly, and honestly to the best of my skill and judgement, So help me God." Two copies of this oath still remain in the old chest behind the organ in the Church, but they have nearly crumbled into dust and I could only make out these few words, and the expressions, "Common Pastures, Common Grounds, Common Meadows", which tell us what their subject is.

The open field of Hook Norton was divided into two parts, called the North Side Field and the South Side Field, and when it was enclosed the property of some people was shifted from one to the other, to be nearer their farm buildings, which they called their Homesteads, or Homestalls. The land was divided into plots, one or more of which were "allotted" to all the claimants, and called the allotment of So and So. The commissioners agreed that if all the open land was allotted to private owners, it would be very hard on the poor people who had been used to cutting furze to burn. So they set aside about forty acres, in the South side field for the poor. This allotment was to be in the hands of trustees, for the good of the poor, and this is still [in 1925] called the Heath Allotment.

As soon as a man had his plot of ground allotted to him he had a fence round it and to keep it in repair, and if a road ran through it, he had to put up a gate, and keep that too. Before these fences were made it must have been no easy task, in a mist after dark to find the way over the hill from Chipping Norton, and folks would have been glad to hear the Church bell ringing at 12 and at 8 o'clock to guide them to the town, as it was called then. When a man had crossed the ford at the bottom of South Hill, and got into the ring of old enclosures and homesteads, he would drop into the "Bell" or the "Old Red Lion" in Southrop or the "Sun", for they were all going then, to get a mug of ale, which was about the only thing there was to drink in those days.

Let us suppose that we are taking a walk up High Street in 1774. There are no pavements, but as it is a fine day in the summer that will not matter. It is June 29th, St Peter's Day, and like the other towns we have a fair on the day of our Patron

Saint. There are two fairs here, however; the other is in November, and we date and pay our bills by these two fairs. The horses are all up in the Horse Fair [now the Sibford Road], but the booths and stalls are in the market place, by the Church. Look at the butter on this stall, it is 8d a lb [3½p a pound]. There is a meat stall too: the mutton is 3½d a lb. [about 1½p], and the sheep's heads are 8d each. See the children running out of the wooden gates into the Churchyard, they are just out of school, the school is in the Church, in the North Transept. They have put a fireplace and chimney in the corner. Of course, we don't have any heat in the Church, but we must keep the Teacher from being frozen. He gets a salary of £3 per year, but the children are very small.

Do you see that boy coming in from the common fields with a bag in his hands? He has caught some sparrows, and he is taking their heads to the Churchwardens, who will give him 2d [1p] per dozen for them. The boys know that, and some days they manage to collect a lot, so that putting them down in the Churchwarden's book takes up a whole page. If a boy, or a man, is lucky enough to get hold of a fox, he cuts off one foot, and takes that, and he gets 1/6d [7½p] or 2/- [10p] for it. Other things they can get money for are snakes, hedgehogs (which they call urchins) and woodpeckers, which they call hickwals. The urchins and hickwals are worth 4d [1½p] each. Perhaps you wonder why the Churchwardens should have anything to do with such things, but you know the Churchwardens and the Overseers make the rates, and spend them, and it is to their interest to keep the place prosperous.

They are having a meeting at the "Sun" now, to settle about buying the Workhouse here, instead of only renting it, and they say that they will have to thatch it next year. Just outside the door of the "Sun" there are two constables standing. It is the first year we have had constables, there is one for the North Side and one for the South Side; they are looking for anyone getting too much drink, or breaking the law in any way. The dungeon is very handy if they want to lock a man up. It is behind John Brain's smithy, in the Market place, a small room with no furniture except a wide wooden bench, with a bar in front to which a man can be handcuffed. If the constable finds a horse, or cow straying, he locks that up too, in the Pound. The clock has just struck and the chimes are playing. They sound well, and so they ought, for we had a new clock only six years ago, and we are always spending

money on new ropes and wires for the chimes. The clock came from Mr Pinfold, of Banbury, and cost 21 pounds.

Here is Mrs Sarah Goffe coming, she is a widow, and has a good deal of property; they say the expense of enclosing the land is over two thousand pounds, what with the act of Parliament, and the lawyers and the valuers, and Mrs Goffe has to pay the fourth largest share of it. They must think a good deal of her, for she is the only woman to sign the award. She comes from a large family too; there is Mrs Elizabeth Goffe, also a widow, the two Miss Goffe's, Mr Joseph and Mr Harry, and Mr John Goffe. You know what a place this is for 'nicknames! Well, we call John Goffe "Nephew Goffe", and would you believe me, that the lawyers have gone and put him in the Award as John Goffe, commonly called "Nephew Goffe". He isn't the only one either. When they wanted to put in William Hall's name, they had to put down William Hall commonly called William Hall on the Hill!

Here comes a stranger, what we call a poor traveller: you see the constable goes up to him at once, and asks him something, and he pulls out a paper. The constable takes it to Mr Anthony Lampet, the Churchwarden, who happens to be standing near. Mr Lampet takes out 6d [2½p] and the constable gives it to the poor traveller, and tells him he had better get on out of the Parish as soon as he can. You see, as we have to keep all of our own poor people out of our rates, we naturally don't want poor people from other parishes on our hands. The law is very strict in guarding our rights, and that paper that the man carries is what we call a "Pass", properly signed which shows what parish he belongs to, and allows him to pass through ours, but not to stay. We don't let any new people come and settle here if they are likely to come on to the parish.

As soon as any family asks for relief, we find out if they have got a legal settlement here. If not, they must go before a Justice of the Peace and be examined, and if it is found that they have come in from some other place, we get an order to send them back to their new parish. Some years we have a great number of these forcible removals; in 1771 we had eleven of them. Sometimes the other parish doesn't want the people any more than we do, so then we go to law about it. A few years ago, Tadmarton went to law with us over an order we got to send them a family, but we won, so they had to pay costs, as well as the expense of sending the

people there. Enstone did the same, made a fuss about a family we sent back there, but we won that case too.

The gentleman going in such a hurry is Dr Minchin, he has got a patient very ill, and he cannot tell if it is the smallpox. If it is, the man will have to be sent to the smallpox house, which the overseers rent for such cases. Last year we had a lot of trouble when Wiggins fell with smallpox, getting an order from Chipping Norton, and then it also cost 10/- [50p] carrying him to the Four Shires Stone. Dr Minchin says the water isn't very good, but it's only eleven years since we put in the new Town Pump; of course, it's rather near the Churchyard.

That clergyman, taking his hat off to Mrs Salmon, is Mr Jones, the curate. Such a neat, tidy sort of man, they say he keeps the Parish Registers beautifully, and he always will have things done properly. He used to get £50 a year, now the commissioners have given him some land instead of the money. It is up on South Hill, next to the open fields of Rollright. You see that man Mr Jones is speaking to? That is John Phipps, clerk and sexton. He is just telling Mr Jones that it is 30 years since they had new books for the Minister and Clerk and it is high time they had some more. Mr Jones laughs, and says probably it will be another four years before they can persuade the Churchwardens of that! Everybody knows that Mr Anthony Lampet is a very careful man, and keeps the accounts so strictly that one year he put down in the accounts at the Vestry Meeting, "Anthony Lampet is out of pocket three pence half penny [under 9p]. "

Let us go up Garret Lane, and see if Mrs Sarah Goffe is looking at the shearing close. I hear she has made up her mind to exchange about 15 acres of her land for the shearing close, and the farm buildings near it. The Bishop of Oxford owns it now but it will suit him better to exchange it for land nearer his other fields at Nil and Hook Norton Lodge. The reason the Bishop has land here is that, when Henry VIII took so much Church property, he took the Hook Norton Manor too, and then gave it to the new Bishopric of Oxford, when he set that up. The Bishop gives a quarter of corn from his fields every year to the poor here; this is called the Bishop of Oxford's Charity.

Now if we go round the corner of the shearing close, we can see the homesteads of Mr Apletree, Mr Thomas Warmington, Mr Prue, Mr Daniel Lampet the

younger, Mrs Ann Harwood and Mr Joseph Goffe. Of course, all these buildings and yards have been enclosed for years, but now, look they are actually making fences round the fields further out! Well we've done very nicely all my time without hedges all over the place, but some people are never satisfied.

MARGARET DICKINS

Brymbo Works Magazine, 1925

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Pauper's Progress

[The following somewhat harrowing tale by 'Canities' (Ralph Mann) reads like fiction but was based by him on a close study of some papers that came his way by chance after being thrown out by a Cheltenham solicitor's office. He was able to fill out the story with other information he had gained through his archival studies. Mr Mann's notes on these papers are now in the Chipping Norton Museum. DJR]

1. The Hiring

Dick Empson stood with the other young men in Chippy Mop, waiting to be hired. Although he had smartened himself up for the occasion, he knew that his jacket and breeches were worn and ragged, and that he was muddy after walking the country lanes from Leafield. He had set out long before dawn, with all his possessions tied in a neat bundle on his back, so that he could at last take his place alongside the men looking for work.

His earliest memories were of being taken to the field where his mother was working in the harvest. Then, when he was seven, he had started to earn the odd penny by staying all day alone in the field waiting to throw stones at any bird that came to eat the corn; if he was lucky enough to kill a bird, the farmer gave him an extra farthing. He could not read or write and had never been to school, but when he was eleven he had started work full-time as a plough-boy. Not that he ever got to handle the plough himself, for that was a skilled job, but he walked alongside the horses, did odd jobs on the farm, and the shilling a week that he earned helped his mother with her increasing family.

Now at last he was big enough to stand with the men at the Mop, and let the farmers size him up for work. Perhaps he was sixteen—he wasn't sure about his age any more—but he was thin and undersized, the smallest at the hiring fair, and most of the farmers hadn't looked twice at him. It was old Michaelmas Day: 10 October 1773.

At last, when he was beginning to despair, one of the farmers stopped and looked him over, made him flex his arms to feel his biceps, and asked him a few questions. Where did he come from then? Where had he been employed before? Was he ready to work hard? "All right, I'll take you", said the farmer. "Here's your hiring penny. Be sure to wait for me outside the Chequers tonight". Dick Empson held the coin—it was a sixpence he had been given—tight in his hand while he walked among the stalls of pedlars and cheapjacks at the fair, looking with amazement at the wares displayed by the light of oil lamps: earthenware pots, iron saucepans, yards of coarse homespun cloth, bottles of quack medicine that would cure everything from the itch to the ague, and even a stall selling pamphlets, ballads, Bibles and dictionaries.

It was while he was admiring a display of brightly coloured silk ribbons that he met Anne Barnet, a girl of his own age, still carrying the mop that she had proudly held when she had been hired by a farmer's wife from Oddington, just over the border in Gloucestershire. When Dick Empson went to take his place outside the Chequers he had spent his sixpence, and Anne Barnet was on her way to Oddington with a bunch of blue ribbons in her hair.

2. The Enclosure

It was late when they set off from the Chequers that night, with farmer Goffe in the saddle of his old horse, and the new hired man, Dick Empson, perched behind him and hanging on tight. The horse walked slowly along the unsurfaced parish roads from Chipping Norton to Hook Norton. John Goffe was taciturn, and Dick had plenty of time to reflect on the new life ahead. Hiring was always a risky business: the contract was binding till next Michaelmas, 1774, whether you liked the place or not,

and there was no way of knowing what he might be asked to do, or where he might have to live. Some labourers were accommodated in the garrets of the farm-house; others had to find lodgings in one of the crowded cottages in the village, sharing a room with the older boys in the family. Most of the five shillings a week that he would earn would go towards his keep.

Dick Empson settled down at Hook Norton. Six days a week he worked for John Goffe—known locally as "Nephew"—and on Sundays after Morning Prayer, when the weather was fine, he walked over to Oddington in Gloucestershire—it wasn't more than ten miles—to spend a couple of hours with his sweetheart, Anne Barnet, before walking back to his lodgings in Hook Norton to face another week's work. Twenty miles was not much further than he might be asked to travel in his daily work as he trudged between the farmer's acre-sized strips of arable scattered about the open fields of Hook Norton.

But big changes were taking place in Hook Norton that year. For years the major landowners—Francis Travell, Nathanael Austin Apletree, Lionel Lampett and the like—had been discussing the advantages that they and the farmers would derive if they could put an end to the Open Fields and all these scattered strips, and instead have all their land brought together in compact farms. 'Enclosure' was the key to big profits. There had been public meetings in the inn to discuss these proposals, a Private Act for the Inclosure of Hook Norton and Southrop had been introduced into Parliament, and for many months Francis Webb of Stanway and James Joseph Jennings junior of Somerton had been surveying the parish, measuring every strip of land and identifying who owned it and who farmed it. The Inclosure Commissioners appointed by Parliament, Francis Burton of Aynho, Thomas Brown of Cowley (Glos), and John Watts of Sulgrave, had met on 28 June 1773 to begin their work of preparing the great new Inclosure Award Map, making sure that every landowner received a fair distribution of good and poor land, arable, pasture and meadow, in proportion to his former acreage. On 24 September 1774, the Hook Norton Inclosure Act was read publicly in the village, and the farmers began to put it into effect.

3. *Poverty*

The Hook Norton Enclosure Award of 1774 meant plenty of hard work for labourers like Dick Empson. First he had to clear his master's land of all bushes and undergrowth so that the new owners could have a fresh start. And then he had to enclose the newly-created fields by digging ditches and planting hawthorn hedges, known as 'quickset' because of their rapid growth. On the other hand, he no longer had to waste time tediously tramping between scattered strips; all John Goffe's land was now brought together, and he began to plan out a new practicable farm.

Dick Empson continued to walk over to Oddington on Sundays, hoping that his absence from church would not be noted. Early in 1775 his sweetheart, Anne Barnet, looking very agitated, broke the news that she was going to have a baby, and asked Dick if he would marry her. Together they went to see the curate of Oddington, their banns were read, and Dick and Anne were married in the old church of St. Nicholas which stands in secluded woodland some distance from the village. There was no room for Anne in his lodgings at Hook Norton, so Dick decided that she would have to come with him back to his family home in Leafield, bringing their new-born son John with them.

Life in Leafield was hard. The Empson family cottage was overcrowded and employment was uncertain. Dick was not able to get regular work. Their slender resources were stretched even further in 1787 when their second son, William, was born. In the autumn of 1779 it was obvious that Anne was again pregnant and this precipitated a family crisis: Dick was out of work again, and it was no longer possible for the growing family to continue to live in the Empson cottage. With bitter reluctance, Dick sent to the Overseers of the Poor at Leafield to see if they could help by finding him work or by supplementing his wages.

The Overseers listened with to his story with concern. Times were hard for ratepayers too, and every pauper added to the pay-roll of the parish pushed up the rates. The following Sunday, after Morning Prayer, the Overseers and Churchwardens met with the Perpetual Curate of Leafield to discuss how they should handle recent applications for poor relief. In the course of the discussion, it emerged that even though Dick Empson was a native of Leafield the parish might

not be responsible for him now, and so they decided that he should be examined by the magistrates.

On 14 October 1779 the Overseer took Dick Empson to see two Justices of the Peace, Revd. Phipps Weston, Vicar of Witney, and Revd. Henry Gabell, Vicar of Standlake, who placed him on oath and then questioned him about his life. Dick told them that he had been born in Leafield but that about six years before ago he had been hired for the year by Farmer Goffe of Hook Norton; that he had married, and had two children with a third on the way, and that they had come back to live with his family in Leafield. The one significant fact was that Dick Empson had once been hired by a farmer in Hook Norton, and had served there a whole year.

The two magistrates soon quickly reached their decision. The legal “place of settlement” for Dick and Anne Empson was Hook Norton, and to Hook Norton they must go. The legal document, known as a Removal Order, was duly drawn up at once and signed: one copy to be kept at Leafield, and one copy for the parish officers at Hook Norton. “We do hereby judge that the said Richard Empson, Anne his wife, and their Children that is to say John and William ... are likely to become chargeable to the said hamlet of Lea-field and that the place of their last legal settlement is in the said parish of Hooknorton”

4. Transportation

It must be getting on for twenty miles from Leafield to Hook Norton—a long journey by foot. However, out of consideration for Anne Empson's condition—her pregnancy was well advanced—the Overseers of the Poor of Leafield permitted her with her two infants to travel by covered wagon, while her husband Dick walked alongside. One of the Overseers, a young farmer on horseback, accompanied them, carrying the Removal Order to hand over to his counterpart at Hook Norton.

The journey was slow and uncomfortable. The long, low wagon was dark and stuffy inside, the babies cried and the solid wooden felloes (outer circle of wheels) jolted mercilessly over the unsurfaced roads. In some places there were such deep ruts and potholes that the driver steered the horses off the road into the adjacent

field. In other places, where the parish Surveyors of the Highways had been more active, the holes were filled with stones and rubble.

Walking beside the wagon, which rarely exceeded two miles an hour, Dick Empson had plenty of time to reflect on how his present predicament had all come about as the result of an incautious agreement made at Chippy Mop six years before when he was still a boy. Now, he and his wife Anne, with their two children, John aged three and William aged one and a half, were being taken back unwillingly to Hook Norton, homeless and without work.

The wagon stopped at Chipping Norton, and the Overseer escorted the Empson family to Chipping Norton workhouse where they were to spend the night in the vagrants' ward. The Overseer, who could charge his expenses to the parish, put up at the Crown & Cushion where the new licensee, Giles Attwood, was struggling to restore confidence after his predecessor's bankruptcy.

Early the next morning—it was October 1779—the Empsons boarded another wagon bound for Hook Norton. To avoid paying the toll charged on the new Banbury turnpike (for the charge levied on broad-fellied wheels was heavy) the wagon followed the old parish roads over the hills through Over Norton and Great Rollright. By mid-afternoon they had reached Hook Norton, and the Leafield Overseer left the Empsons waiting miserably by the church while he went in search of the Hook Norton Overseers to hand over his charge.

Had Dick Empson been able to read, he might have reflected on the last verse of the satirical Labourer's Love-Song:

*When yonder Church would lure thee on
With visions of a bride,
Turn thee, thou fool, and think upon
The building by its side:
There stands the Workhouse - look with awe
Upon that place of dread
Where Paupers go, who break the law
Which says: THOU SHALT NOT WED.*

5. *The Workhouse*

The Hook Norton Overseer was decidedly displeased at the unwelcome arrival of the family from Leaffield. He accepted the Removal Order presented to him by the Leaffield Overseer, and vented his irritation on the woebegone Empson family waiting outside Hook Norton church. Conditions were hard in Hook Norton, too, in 1779, and the addition of a pauper family of four, with a fifth expected soon, would add to the ratepayers' burden.

He hustled the Empsons along the street to the East End where, five years before, the Hook Norton parish officers had invested in purchasing a parish workhouse (where 'Apple Gates' now stands). They had rethatched the building, and were employing the Workhouse Governor, John Dee, to provide for more than twenty inmates at £100 a year. Although this worked out at about five shillings per person per week—the average wage of a labourer—John Dee was expected to run the workhouse at a profit, since the surplus was his own income. The cost of accepting the Empson family would come directly out of his own pocket.

Conditions in the workhouse were not yet as bad as they were to become fifty years later, but for Dick and Anne they were humiliating enough. On arrival they had to submit to being washed and cleaned of vermin. Although they were not prevented from seeing each other during the day, Dick was sent to sleep in the men's ward, while his children stayed with Anne in the women's ward. The food was frugal, poorly cooked and unappetising, and the work given for Dick was hard and long. The men from the workhouse were loaned out to farmers looking for cheap labour; Anne stayed in the workhouse with the children and took her share of washing, scrubbing, ironing, mending and cooking.

But at least they had a roof over their heads, newly thatched, the children received a basic but adequate education in the three Rs (which was more than most other village children received), and they had the company of other destitute families from the village, many of whom remembered Dick Empson from the time when he had worked for Farmer Goffe. On Sundays the inmates of the workhouse were taken to church, where they were made to stand ignominiously at the back, clearly identifiable as the parish paupers. Little Joe Empson was born in the workhouse in

1780 and was baptised in St. Peter's on 14 May. Later came Jim, and then Richard, named after his father. Little Richard was a sickly child, and died in infancy, the minister carefully noting in the burial register (24 June 1788) 'infant and pauper'.

Ten years is a long time to spend in the workhouse, but deliverance came at last in an unexpected way. The French Revolution of 1789 led to the re-embodying of the Royal Oxfordshire Regiment of Militia three years later, and a quota of recruits was fixed for every parish. The village constables applied great pressure to obtain recruits, and able-bodied men in the workhouse were ideal volunteers. The bounty given on enlistment was sufficient to enable Anne Empson and her sons to move into lodgings. John, the eldest, had moved away when he was sixteen, Will was now old enough to be employed as a labourer, and Joe and Jim were ploughboys. And Dick Empson himself, smartly dressed in militia uniform, was earning a shilling a day—more than ever in his life before.

The Militia were moved from Reading to Salisbury in 1793, and then to the Sussex Downs in 1794. But in April 1795 came the disgraceful episode when the Oxfordshire Militia, under the leadership of Henry Parish of Chipping Norton and Edward Cooke of Witney, mutinied at East Blatchington, seized the port of Newhaven, and were disarmed after a short confrontation by the Lancashire Fencibles. After the Courts-Martial and executions were over, the Oxfordshire Militia were punished by being sent to Ireland to help suppress the insurrection of Wolfe Tone and his United Irishmen. As Dick Empson could not write, Anne Empson heard nothing more from her husband, but when the militiamen at last returned in 1800, Dick Empson was not among them: he had died in Ireland.

P.S. The main events in "Pauper's Progress" are based on historical evidence, but the story has been embroidered by the author. Young Joe Empson, born in 1780, grew up to be Parish Constable and a highly respected member of the community. He saved up to become a farmer, moved away, and his great-granddaughter now [1990] lives in Solihull.

1805: A Most Convenient Discovery

Everyone was rejoicing over the glorious victory of Nelson at Trafalgar on 21 October 1805 – everyone except Richard Fisher. Richard Fisher had other matters on his mind. His mother, Rachel Fisher of Whatcote, a wealthy elderly widow, had died the previous year, but probate of her will and the inheritance of her estate were held up by a legal technicality. Forty years ago, when Richard was an infant, his great-uncle had left a complicated and rather eccentric will, and now Richard found that he needed to produce evidence that one of great-uncle Anthony's legacies—for £20—had actually been paid. But it was all so long ago, and the people concerned were all dead.

And then Richard Fisher made a most convenient discovery. He 'found' the receipt for the £20, dated November 1767, and properly signed by the beneficiaries, Joseph and Mary Hyatt of Hook Norton, “who... in November 1767 ... received the said Legacy ... and whereas the said Joseph Hiatt hath long since departed out of this life ... and whereas the receipt hereunto annexed signed by the said Joseph Hiatt and Mary his wife at the time of the execution ... was lost and mislaid but hath since been found by the said Richard Fisher”

All was well: the receipt and Richard Fisher's bond of 13 November 1805 were accepted; his mother's will proved, and the lawyers satisfied. No-one ever doubted the authenticity of Richard Fisher's daring forgery. But Richard Fisher had overlooked a couple of awkward facts. Great-uncle Anthony made his will in 1766, but he did not die till 1771 when the legacies were paid. And Mary Townsend Huckin to whom he bequeathed £20 did not marry Joseph Hyatt until 1771. So the receipt which Richard Fisher 'found' had the wrong date—it was four years too early. A harmless deception perhaps? Joseph and Mary Hyatt were both dead, and no-one could dispute the receipt. But Local History has an uncomfortable knack of bringing things to light. I wonder whether Mary Townsend Huckin ever did get her £20?

CANITIES

(*Newsletter*, 13: 2, March 1988)

1817: Seand Hir A Latle Money

On 11 January 1817 Mr. Thomas White, the churchwarden of Hook Norton, received an unusual letter. As usual in those days, the letter was written on a single sheet of paper which was then folded and addressed without being placed in an envelope. The address itself was sufficiently unusual to make Thomas White wonder that it had ever reached him at all:

To Mr. White Chourch
Warener Youkenorthone
8 Miles from Bambrone
In Oxfortshire.

Presumably he had to pay the postage, which was based on weight and distance; the letter had come from Louth in Lincolnshire, well over one hundred miles away, and not far from the North Sea. It had taken less than a fortnight to reach Hook Norton, which, in those days before the penny post, with rough unsurfaced roads and horse-drawn wagons, was quite good going.

Unfolding the letter, Thomas White read:

Louth Linclonshire Disember 29 1816

Mr. Thos White I tack this apertunety
of Righting to you and to in form you that
Mary Hyde is Bean Lying veary ill for the
Cors of thre wickes and is very much Deresede
At this time and hase nothing to helpe
Here self and will be very much a Bleage
To you if you will seand hir a latle money
To asept hir at this time in hear Distres
And you most Drect to Mr. William Feanton

James Streat Louth Linclonshire.

The rigours of the Elizabethan Poor Law, in its last days before the radical amendment of 1834, required that Mary Hyde in desperation had to turn for social security to her birthplace, where the four parish officers—the two churchwardens and the two overseers—could be held legally responsible for making provision for her from the rates. At least she may have been thankful that she no longer had to make the long return journey from Louth to Hook Norton before receiving her poor relief. It is likely that the churchwarden responded to this plea; he was not inhumane—and he kept the letter.

CANITIES

(*Newsletter*, 14: 2, March 1989)

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