

Downham's Workhouse

A History by Elizabeth Howard.

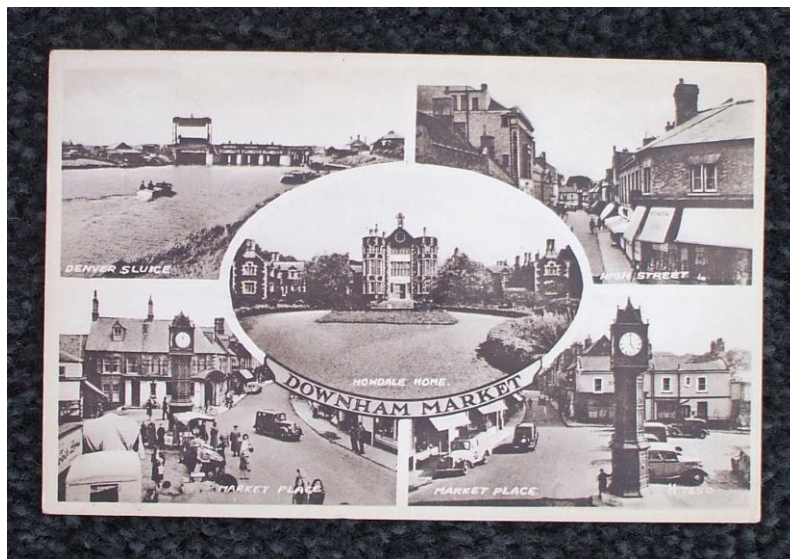


300 YEARS OF CARING

The Poor House to High Haven

St Mark`s Gospel chapter 14 verse 7 in the King James version has " For ye have the poor with you always , and whensoever ye will ye may do them good . "

For as long as the church of St Edmund has stood on the hill in Downham Market , there will have been a poor house alongside , maintained by the church and for the benefit of the poorest people of Downham .



Over the centuries the poor house and its pauper inmates had been maintained and cared for by monies left in legacies in wills of local people and from the Poor Rate levied on tradesmen

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and farmers who in a good year made a little money and paid a proportion of it to the church for the Overseers of the Poor to distribute.

One such benefactor was the Rev Thomas Batchcroft who was born in Bexwell in 1572 , educated at Ely School and who became a priest . He was appointed Master of Caius College Cambridge in 1626 but was expelled during the Civil war in 1649 and replaced by William Dell an extreme Puritan . With the Restoration in 1660 Batchcroft was reinstated but died a very short time later . Apart from his great gift to Downham , he also left substantial bequests to Methwold and various Suffolk parishes .

His £100 bequest to Downham is recorded on a wooden board in the vestry of St Edmund`s church . It says " March 1660 . The Reverend Thomas Batchcroft DD who by his will gave and bequeathed as follows : that is to say , I give one hundred pounds to purchase five pounds per annum in land for ever , for the use of the poor of Downham Market to be distributed amongst them to buy victuals to nourish them , clothes to cover them and firing to warm them and one of these to be done yearly for ever for better performance of which gift he requested the minister of the town and two of the chiefest inhabitants thereof , to perform that office year after year for the use and benefit of the poor thereof for ever . The land purchased with the above money consists of the two following pieces of land in Downham Market , that is to say five acres , two roods and three perches of pasture land abutting upon the turnpike road leading to Wisbeach toward the north , and upon Saint John`s Eau towards the west and one acre three roods and thirteen perches of pasture land abutting the Ouse river bank towards the west and Saint John`s Eau towards the east and upon the public house and garden belonging to the Bridge Reeves of Downham Market toward the north ."

Henry Saffery in his will dated 1721 proved 1721/2 " I give and devise unto my said son Thomas Saffery £30 and forty shillings to be distributed to the poor of Downham Market by the churchwardens and Overseers at their discretion ." Forty shillings or £2 would be worth about £170 today and a useful amount for the Overseers to distribute . An earlier John Saffrey in his will dated 1687 also left the sum of forty shillings to be distributed on St John`s day to forty poor widows .



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The Account books of the poor house were found when High Haven was completed in 1969 and given to the local library these date from 1823 and make very interesting reading .

The first Master mentioned in these accounts is Robert Simson and he was paid 45/- a week to provide for 15 inmates with " sufficient meat, drink, washing, lodging, cloathing , employment and all other things necessary for their keeping and maintenance " He had a further allowance of 3/6d per week if he overspent .

This small poor house now believed to be the late Police Station and local jail then Breckland house , received two payments amongst others in 1825 and 1827 from the Poor Rate for burying a drowned man and a drowned boy . In 1832 the workhouse paid out 13/- for a coffin for Wortley`s daughter and in July a huge sum of £1.7s.7d to women laying out William Francis of Salters Lode who died of the cholera . "

Throughout 1833 Raper`s wife seems to have had an insatiable appetite for mutton , one shilling and fourpence worth is given to her at regular fortnightly intervals . In 1834 " Raper`s wife still ill , mutton 2/4d " .

In May and October 1833 four weight pounds of mutton is given to Robert Haylett and two pounds to his wife . However the next entry for the next day in October shows that 4/- was paid for women to lay out Haylett`s wife and 4/- for carriers .

In 1834 cholera was about again and an adult coffin cost one guinea and a child`s coffin cost 10/6 . But in among all the gloom and illness and death , a midwife was paid 5/- to attend Anne Buttersin in the workhouse and a further 1/8d was paid for a pint of gin for her . It is not clear if the gin was for Anne Buttersin or the midwife , but perhaps they shared it .

In 1836 the average rateable value of Downham Market parish was £1,066 and the poor rate was one eighth of that being £133 per annum . The Union created in 1835 by the Poor Law Amendment Act brought 34 parishes into the Downham Union and the workhouse proposed was to be for 250 persons . The Board spent many an anxious meeting at the Castle Inn in 1836 and 1837 valuing each parish in the union and trying to estimate how much income they would have to support the paupers of 34 parishes which could be as many as 250 people. In addition there were also disbursements for out-relief . That is those people whose condition was not so serious that it warranted them being removed to the workhouse . In the Cambridge Chronicle of Friday 26 August 1836 , " The Board of Guardians of the Downham Union, will assemble at the Castle Inn in Downham Market at 10 o`clock in the morning of Friday 9th September to Elect Medical and Relieving Officers to receive Plans for a Union Workhouse and Tenders for Contracts for Flour . The Board of Guardians divided their Union into the following Districts for the Operations of the Medical and Relieving Officers . Downham District . Downham, Denver, Ryston, Fordham , Hilgay , Southery , Welney (Norfolk) Welney (Cambridgeshire) Roxham Also such parts of Wimbotsham and Stow as lies on the East Side of Tongs Drain . Fincham District . Marham , Fincham, Barton ,

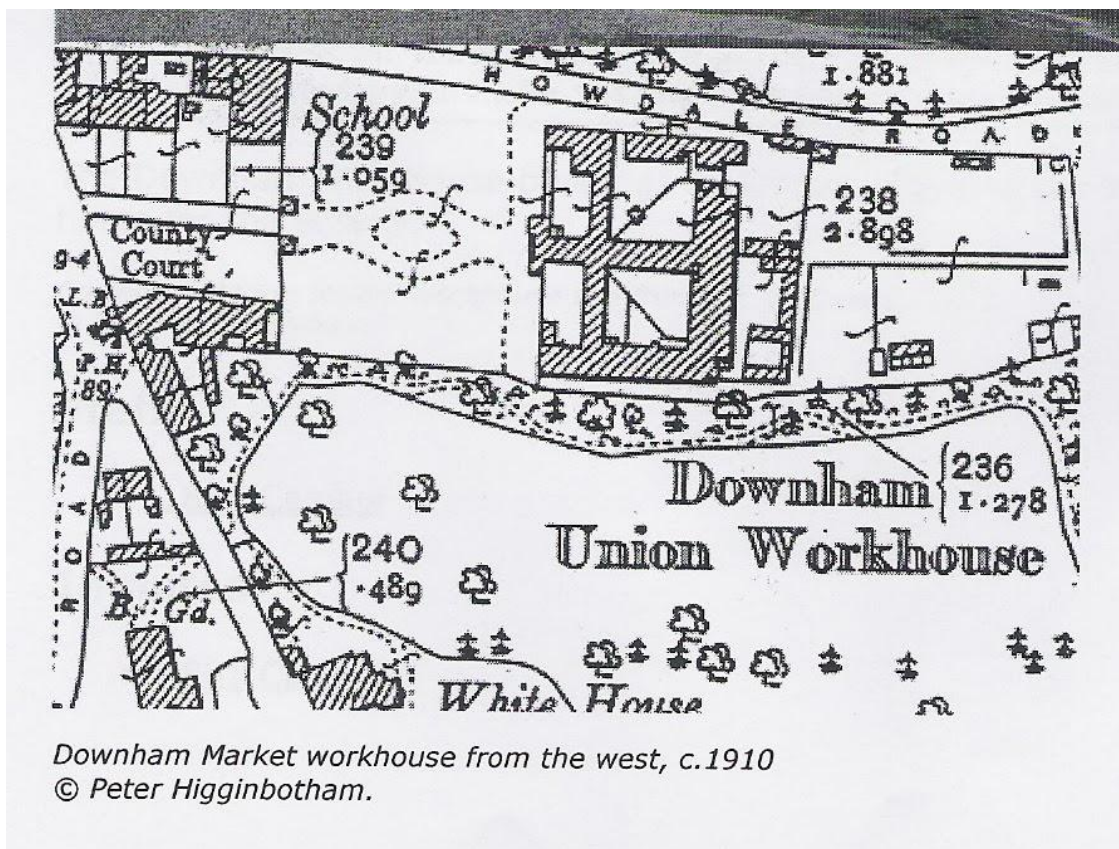
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Stradsett, Crimphesham , Bexwell , West Dereham , Wereham , Boughton , Stoke , Wretton , Wiggshall District, Wiggshall St Mary Magdalen, Wiggshall St German`s , Wiggshall St Mary , Wiggshall St Peter, Watlington , Wormegay Holme, South Runcton , Tottenhill , Wallington, Stow, Wimbotsham , Shouldham Thorpe , or Shouldham , and such part of Downham as lies on the west side of Tongs Drain . !

At an October meeting in 1836 , Downham district needed £7.19s 9d in money , £3.10s in kind, a total of £11.9s 9d for the week. These amounts were distributed by the Relieving Officer of the district in agreement with the parish Overseers of the poor .

The poor house was usually close to the church and was usually owned by the parish . The Poor Law compelled parishes to look after their own people those born in the parish or belonging to the parish by legal settlement . Those who were successful in moving to a different parish got a Settlement certificate from their new parish a copy of which was sent to their original parish . It was crucial that if people wanted to live in another parish , that they were fit and well and working , if not the parish would not accept them and they would be removed back to their parish of origin . These people got a Removal order and it was enforceable taking them back to their parish of origin . No small rural parish could afford more than its own poor .



#3

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Unsurprisingly this new Government initiative , the Poor Law Amendment Act created opportunities for the great and the good of the district to become the power brokers . Some were dull , good and honest but some also took advantage of their new powers to advance friends and family in new positions and jobs .

At the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815 , the army and the navy were demobbed and discharged back into their parishes with or without tiny pensions . Here in West Norfolk by 1816 there were riots resulting in hangings at Norwich castle , riots whose slogan was BREAD OR BLOOD . Add to that a series of terrible harvests over the next 20 years and you have the makings of a real national crisis. The old simple ways were inadequate and a new Government , anxious to avoid revolution , came up with a new Poor Law Amendment Act in 1835 .

On Wednesday 24th August 1836 at the Castle Inn, at 10 in the forenoon, the nominated Guardians of the Poor met , the names are familiar , William Bagge, Edward Roger Pratt, John Dering , and James Bradfield among others ..

Immediately the Guardians chose Mr Charles Berners Plestow of Watlington Hall as their Chairman . Watlington Hall , which is long gone, had been designed in part by a young architect called W J Donthorn , who will play a large part in the workhouse development .

The next matters on the agenda of that first meeting were that Messrs Gurney bankers should be appointed Treasurers to the Union , and that the Medical Officer for Downham District should be paid £110 per annum , and that the salary shall include accommodation for attendance, medicine , assistance in such cases as midwifery , as the Board of Guardians may require , the performance of surgical operations , the provision of medical instruments (trusses excepted) and any other matter used in the treatment of Disease or accident for all poor persons .

Then it was moved and seconded that it was expedient to erect a workhouse for the Union ; that the workhouse be provided for not exceeding 250 persons . It was moved further that a Committee be appointed to report to the Board as to a suitable site for the erection of the workhouse . And further that advertisements be inserted in the Bury Post, the Cambridge Chronicle and both the Norwich papers for Plans for a workhouse for 250 paupers classified according to the regulations of the Poor Law Commissioners to be accompanied by an estimate of the probable expense of erection .

In September 1836 Thomas Garneys Wales was appointed Medical Officer for the Downham District . But most of that week`s meeting was taken up by the discussion as to where the workhouse should be built . The committee viewed two sites . The workhouse piece adjoining the lane leading to the Howdale containing one acre and the north piece of the Cambridge ground in Wimbotsham containing about five acres . " From its proximity to Downham your committee are of opinion that the workhouse piece is the most eligible for the Union house . The situation is dry and airy " The Board duly elected the Downham site as being the best one by 23 votes to 10 for Wimbotsham .

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Still in September , the Board examined several plans for the Workhouse and finally settled on the Plans of Mr Donthorn as the most eligible for the workhouse , noting that Mr Donthorn`s square plan return at a cost of £2,000 and this proposal was carried unanimously by the Board Full of their own importance, the Board now added a rider that they and the Building Committee should be given powers to alter Mr Donthorn`s plans " to an extent not exceeding £120 . This was going to cause a lot of problems all round in the next eighteen months . The Board then moved that advertisements for the building of the workhouse be put in the Norfolk papers and that Mr Peckover of Wisbech be accepted as security for Mr Gurney the Treasurer and that they enter a joint bond for the sum of £2,000.

Like other public building works under committee control , the initial estimate of cost was going to be woefully inadequate .

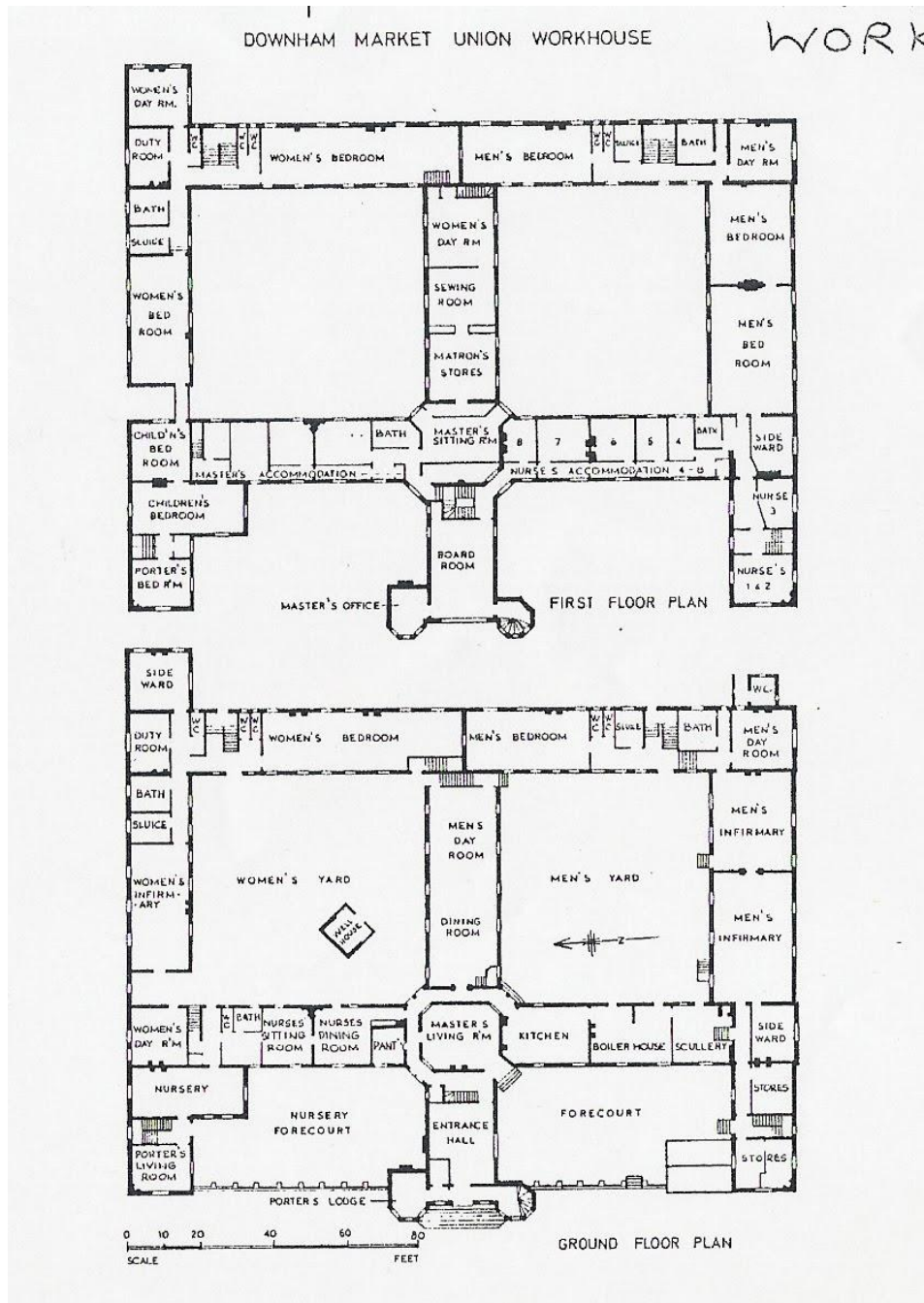
A diversion of interest came in Oct 1836 when the Treaurer of Thorpe Lunatic Asylum asked the Board for payment of several sums of money for pauper lunatics presumably belonging to Downham and the Union parishes .

A note at the 12th Oct 1836 meeting instructs that Mr Donthorn and the Clerk of Works must be clear that no building works are carried out in the frost . Work however has begun and the Contractor , Mr Briggs , is " to commence forthwith . " and immediately the Building committee start altering Mr Donthorn`s plans by insisting that the staircases and windows should be of stone not wood ; the fence in front of the Boys and Girls yard should be of iron not wood ; that the water spouting conducting pipes round the house should be installed and two reservoirs for the water built . Although each of these items cost less than £120 the cut off point for Board amendments to the plans, collectively they cost over £200.

As building continued so did the Building Committee`s involvement .

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At this lengthy meeting of 12th Oct , the Board also discuss how the "slope " which they think can be used to advantage for cellars or other uses and that windows be inserted in the buildings for that purpose . It seems also that to build such a large building extra depth of foundations may be needed and must be paid for at " per rod " .

A Christmassy note comes to the attention of the Board on 16th Nov 1836 . The Institute for the Indigent Blind in Norwich writes to say that a pauper named William Chapman belonging

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to Fordham parish wishes to leave the Asylum , and that he was intending to marry a blind girl . The Board instruct the Clerk to write to the Institute that Chapman may come back but he will have to maintain himself or be confined to the workhouse .

The first small disagreement between the Board and the Contractor Mr Briggs comes in the last meeting of 1836 when Mr Briggs asks for a variation in his contract as to payments , but the Board are firm and write that no alteration can be made .

In the new year of 1837 , contracts are entered into with Mr Tilyard of Norwich for one dozen pairs of mens shoes, one dozen boys, one dozen girls and one dozen womens , of various sizes . More importantly the Board having already set a date for the completion of the building of the workhouse are now reluctantly agreeing to an extension of this date to 14th Sept 1837 . And still mindful of the public unrest , the Board agree that the Contractor be excepted for riots .

The new year message from the Board of Guardians to HM`s Principal Secretary of State at the Home Department says " The poor have this last winter been generally extensively employed instead of spending their time in Beer Houses and other places of unprofitable resort ."

1837 starts with some very busy meetings , and the shortcomings of Mr Donthorn as an architect are being exposed . Apart from the lowest tender for the building from Mr Briggs of £3,532 almost double the original estimate of £2,000 , additional costs are being allowed for the " depth of brickwork caused by the uneven-ness of the ground " surely Mr Donthorn noticed this when drawing up his plans . The garden of High Haven today is noticeably sloping . The new depth of brickwork adds £263 to the costs , and now the plans must be adjusted to lower the kitchen , scullery , pantry and larder and all workhouse floors to meet the ground . This with other suggestions made by Dr Kay of the Poor Law Commissioners had added a further £672 to the overall costs . In the original cost no entrance gates , boundary wall, and making a roadway up to the entrance of the workhouse have been taken into account and a further £295 is added to the cost.

At this point the Board of Guardians makes an application to the Poor Law Commissioners to borrow £5,000. Time is ticking by and the Board order that " the walls of the Union Workhouse be immediately carried up level and that the works stopped be immediately proceeded with Ordered that £600 be paid to Mr Briggs . "

Now with the building itself proceeding , the Board of Guardians appoint another committee , this time to " ascertain the best method of fitting up the Union House ". And to help them the Board order Mr Brown , master of the current poor house , to attend the next meeting on Thursday . In addition the clerk to the Board is instructed to write to Mr Briggs the Contractor that it is reported to the Board by Mr Darley that the workhouse will not be completed at the appointed time and that a request must be made to Mr Briggs to proceed more rapidly .

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As the summer of 1837 moves on advertisements are put in the Norfolk papers and the Bury and Cambridge Chronicle plus two London papers for a Master and Matron for the workhouse to be elected this day 5 weeks , offering a salary of £80 per annum for the Master and £20 for the Matron. In addition the Porter will be paid £25 per annum and the Chaplain to the Union paid £40 per annum . The Board request Dr Kay to look for a suitable schoolmaster on his next trip to Scotland at a salary of £35 per annum .

But as August ends Mr Darley is still reporting to the Board " that the Union House was going on very unsatisfactorily . The Board resolved to proceed to view the House" .

This viewing took place on 7th September 1837 just one week before the due date of completion and all that can be reported is that the house is " now proceeding properly". Realising that the paupers cannot occupy a house without furnishings , the Board now spend money with urgency and order quantities of all the necessaries of life , knives, lamps , tin mugs, soup cans, . Messrs Coleman get the contract for bedsteads , iron, at 14/- each in various sizes ; Messrs Johnson get the contract for sedge mats for the beds , Mr Harman gets the contract for blankets , Mr Ryley for Scotch Forfar sheeting , and towelling . Mr Baker gets the contract for cotton rugs, Mr Harman again for flannel and shirting , and Mr Johnson for sergeever practical Mr Hawes gets the contract for shrouds , and Mr Palmer gets the contract for huge number and variety of shoes including expensive men`s Highlows at 8/6d a pair . Mr Hawes is to provide stockings and hats .

The beds are to have a pair of blankets each and one and a half sheets ; and that they be filled with long straw .

And the paupers may be without clothes so the Board now orders yards of grograin for petticoats, stout twist , whole suits of mens clothes , stays are very expensive at £1.2.4d a dozen .

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The spending spree is halted for a while by a Mr Bell, solicitor of Downham , appearing before the Board to claim compensation for damage done to Mrs Poll`s mill on the Howdale during the building of the workhouse . Inevitably a sub committee is formed to see what damage has been done to Mrs Poll`s mill.

Further and far too late , an advert is inserted in the Norfolk papers for tenders for the building of a seven foot wall on the north and east side of the Union Workhouse land . Whoever got this tender and built this wall would be gratified to know his wall still stands without any maintenance 175 years later .

In October 1837 progress is still continuing , the Clerk is to order deal tables and benches and fixtures . The Building committee reports that the house would not be completed for some time and that the Clerk give notice to the Contractor that the penalty for not having the house completed according to contract would be inflicted . And the fitting out committee now want a boiler and oven in the kitchen instead of the present one on order .

Food is now the main consideration , and Mr Scott of Downham gets the contract for the supply to the Union of Dorset cheese , brown soap, salt , soda , loaf sugar , bastard sugar , rice , treacle , starch , mustard , black tea, green tea, vinegar , oats, bacon, . Mr Bolton gets the contract for the supply of " good steer beef at 7/- per stone , steer suet at 7/- per stone , mutton at 7/- per stone and pork at 7/6d per stone . Messrs Bennett and Goose get the contract to " supply and fit up the fixtures of the Union Workhouse . "

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At last the candidates for the position of Master and Matron are interviewed, Mr and Mrs Dakins, Mr and Mrs Pyle, Mr and Mrs Gostling, Mr and Mrs Harrison, Mr and Mrs Muskett , Mr and Mrs Wright , Mr and Mrs Harvey, Mr and Mrs Chamberlain , and Mr and Mrs Fisher . After due consideration, 18 votes were given to Mr and Mrs Pyle who were appointed Master and Matron at a salary of £80 and £20 a piece per annum .

And " Roe " is appointed Porter at £25 per annum being allowed to maintain his wife , " she making herself useful in the house " .

The sub committee looking into the damage to Mrs Poll`s mill , report back that damage has been done and recommend that £100 is offered as compensation.

By the meeting of 19th October 1837, the Board of Guardians are of the opinion that the workhouse is very nearly completed and in " many instances that the defects may be remedied without any hindrance to the house being occupied and that in the opinion of the committee the house although not finished may be accepted as soon as the necessaries and furniture can be got in . "

The committee also say they are " extremely dissatisfied with the inattention of the architect Mr Donthorn ...and he be requested to attend the Union House on 26th October. That the Committee will meet him on that day and that the house be thoroughly examined at 10 o`clock precisely . Mr Donthorn and Mr Briggs , present , agreed that the building should be forthwith completed and Mr Donthorn further stated that he did not consider any blame was attached to him as he had frequently given orders to Mr Briggs but" he could not get him to attend to them . "

The meeting of 26th October at the Workhouse was understandably busy and fraught . The Board are " extremely surprised " at the inattention of Mr Briggs . There is a long list of essential building works to be completed the pipes to the washing places are incomplete , the water spouts are not put up , the urinals ordered by Mr Donthorn are not done , the hand rails to the stairs are not done , the windows are not embedded or complete, the floors are in an unfinished state and very importantly , the water closet to be fitted for the Guardians has not been done and the current fireplace in the Board room is inadequate " not of a proper size or quality " .

A further blow comes in the form of a letter to the Board of Guardians from the Royal Exchange that they have " declined advancing any further sums to the Union " . The Treasury now has to step in to close the financial gap and guarantee the full finished sum of £4,250.

By 9th November 1837 a further letter is received from Mr Briggs the contractor undertaking that the Board should now take possession of the Union Workhouse without prejudice to the contract . But nothing is that simple and now the Board have the workhouse , they must decide what to do with those " indigent poor " who are not in the workhouse . " Outdoor relief is to be continued in the following classes 1) the aged , 2) the infirm , 3) indigent widows with families of children too young to work , 4) indigent widows in the first 3 months of their

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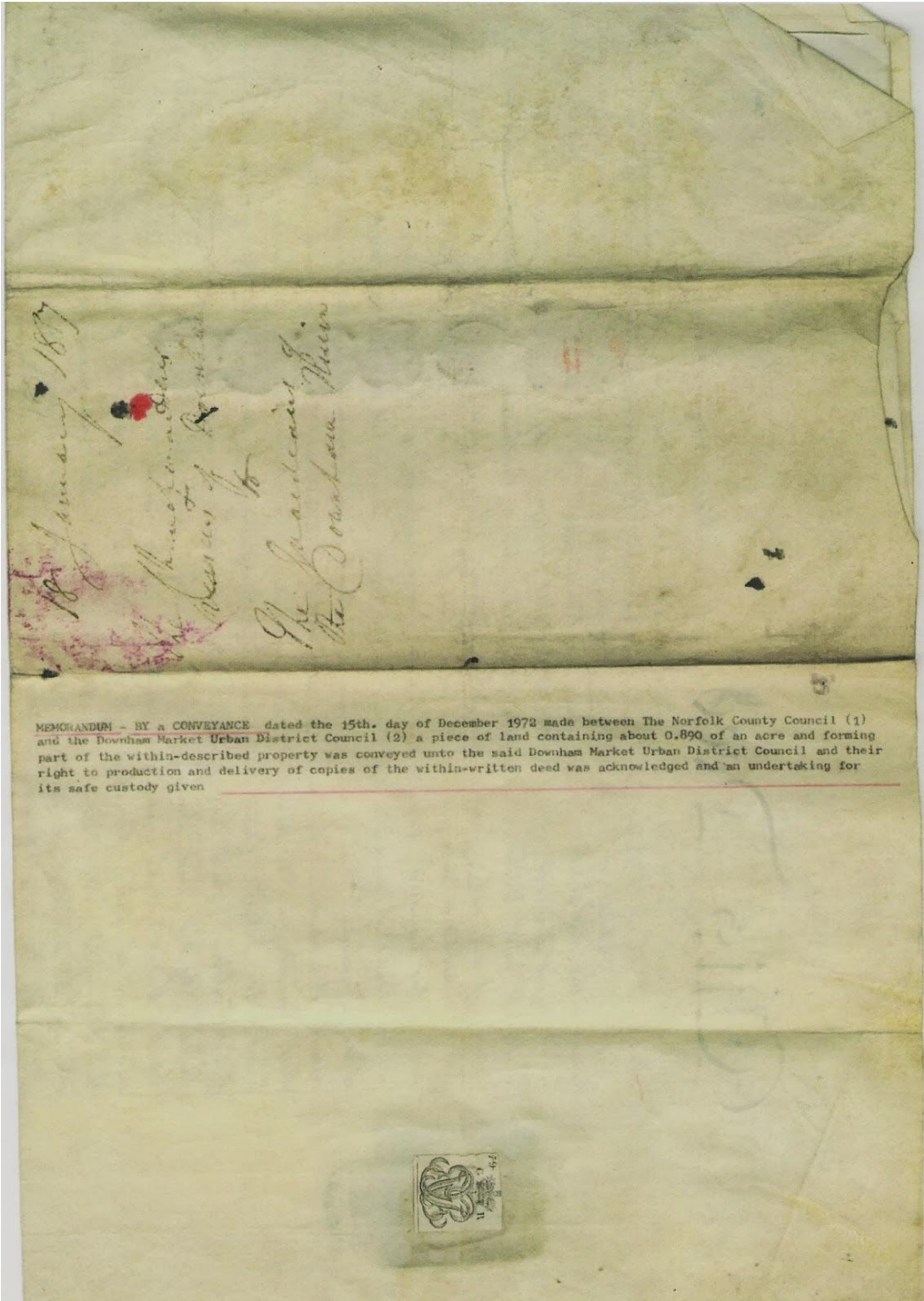
widowhood , 5) cases of accident, sickness and urgent need , 6) that relief for paupers who are resident beyond the limits of the Union be discontinued except for the aged , infirm and sick ."

The meeting of 23rd November 1837 was held in the Board room of the Union Workhouse . Mr Donthorn states " that the mass is completed but there are several little points to be done ; overflow pipes, buckets in the well are too heavy , the dining hall casements must be made to fit , gutters over the infirmary , the stove in the Board room , chimney in the committee room , some brick floors need relaying , the ventilation to the ward over the laundry , all still need to be finished ". The committee also recommend that iron bars are fitted in the windows next to the public road and that the wall alongside be raised to 7ft .

But on the 28th December 1837 finally , Garneys Wales, surgeon , having examined the workhouse , states " all the rooms are fit for the reception of the paupers with the exception of the north infirmary and room below . "

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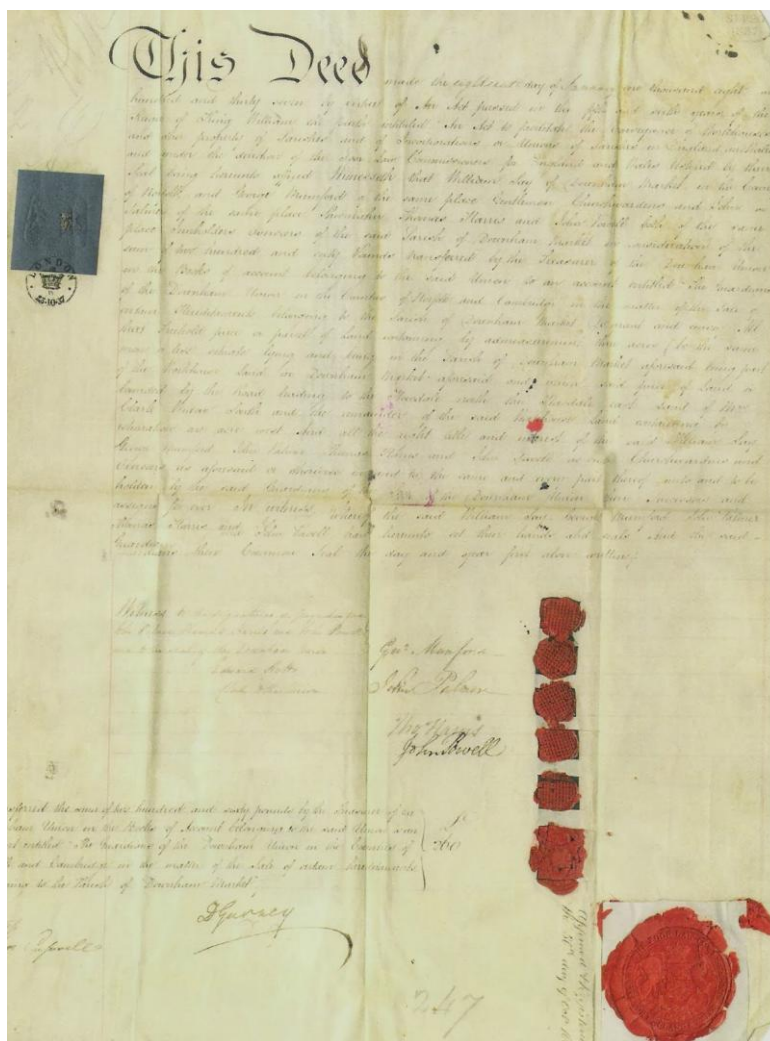
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Chapter Two

Extracts from the Minute Book of the Board of Guardians of the Downham Union Workhouse from 1836.

Board of Guardians Minute Book C/GP/5/1 NRO



Deed of Sale

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August 1836 Downham Union

Present Bexwell Alfred Muskett

Downham West William Johnson Sanders

Downham Market George Mumford , Michael Lelland , etc .

Magistrates Guardians ex officio

Edward Roger Pratt, esq

John Thurlow Dering , esq

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William Bagge, esq
James Bradfield Sanders Bradfield, esq
Charles Berners Plestow, esq
William Lowth Jones, esq
The Rev Arthur Loftus, clerk.

At the first meeting of the Board of Guardians held at the Castle Inn in Downham on Wednesday 24th August 1836 at 10 o'clock in the fore noon.

Present Edward Roger Pratt, esq, Mr Ambrose Thompson, John Thurlow Dering, William Bagge, etc.

Moved by Mr Bradfield seconded by Mr Milnes that Mr Plestow be elected Chairman. Carried unanimously.

Moved by Mr Mumford seconded by Mr George Wood that the Directors of the East of England Bank be appointed Treasurers to the Union.

Moved that Messrs Gurney be appointed Treasurers to the Union.

Moved that the Medical officer for Downham District be paid £110 per annum. That the salary shall include accommodation for attendance, medicine, assistance in such cases as midwifery as the Board of Guardians may require, the performance of surgical operations, the provision of surgical instruments (trusses excepted) and any other matter used in the Treatment of Disease or accident for all poor persons.

Moved by Mr Milnes seconded by Mr Brown that it is expedient to erect a workhouse for the Union. Carried unanimously. Moved that a committee be appointed to report to the Board as to a suitable site for the erection of the workhouse. Carried unanimously. Moved that an advertisement be inserted in the Bury Post, the Cambridge Chronicle and both the Norwich papers for Plans for a workhouse for 250 paupers classified according to the regulations of the Poor Law Commissioners to be accompanied by an estimate of probable expense of erection.

[Bury and Norwich Post and East Anglian, 21st Sept 1836

Downham Union

To Builders and Others

Persons desirous of contracting for the erection of a new Union Workhouse to be situate in Downham Market may see plans and specifications at the Clerks office or at the Office of the Architect, Mr W J Donthorn, 18 Hanover St, Hanover Sq, London any day after 30th Sept next.

Tenders are to be sent to the Clerk on or before 11th Oct next (postage and carriage paid) and on the outside of each tender to be written "Tender for the erection of the Downham Union House". Edward Hett, Clerk. Downham Market, 14th Sept 1836]

9th Sept 1836

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Resolved that Thomas Negus Rose be appointed Relieving officer for the Fincham district and reside in the parish of Hilgay . Moved that Thomas Garneys Wales be appointed Medical officer for the Downham district .

The Committee set up for the purpose of reporting as to a suitable site for the workhouse reported as follows . Your committee proceeded to view two sites offered for the erection of the Union workhouse , viz, a portion of the workhouse piece adjoining the lane leading to the Howdale containing one acre and the North piece of the Cambridge ground in Wimbotsham containing about 5 acres . From its proximity to Downham your committee is of the opinion that the workhouse piece is the most eligible site for the Union house . The situation is dry and airy and it is expected that the difference in price in the sites offered will be compensated by stabling not required if the Union house is erected on Workhouse land . The price of the workhouse piece three acres at a cost of £86.13s 4d per acre being £260 and of the other piece about 5 acres at £40 per acre being about £200 . Your committee beg to state that the whole of the workhouse piece contains about 4 acres and that about one acre thereof fronting the Turnpike road was not offered for sale and forms a part of the site recommended . Votes for Downham site 23, Wimbotsham , 10 .

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This deed made this 18th day of January one thousand eight hundred and thirty seven by virtue of An Act passed in the fifth and sixth years of the Reign of King William the fourth intituled An Act to facilitate the conveyance of Workhouses and other property of Parishes and of Incorporations or Unions of Parishes of England and Wales and under the direction of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales testified by their seal hereunto affixed Witnesseth that William Say of Downham Market in the county of Norfolk and George Mumford of the same place gentlemen Churchwardens and John Palmer of the same place shoemaker Thomas Harris and John Powell of the same place Innholders Overseers of the said parish of Downham Market in consideration of the sum of two hundred and sixty pounds transferred by the Treasurer of the Downham Union in the books of Account of the said Union to an account entitled The Guardians of the Downham Union in the counties of Norfolk and Cambridge in the matter of the sale of certain hereditaments belonging to the parish of Downham Market Do grant and convey all that freehold piece or parcel of land containing by admeasurement three acres (be the same more or less) situate lying and being in the parish of Downham Market aforesaid being part of the Workhouse land in Downham Market aforesaid and which said piece of land is bounded by the road leading to the Howdale north the Howdale east land of Mrs Clark widow south and the remainder of the said Workhouse land containing by estimation one acre west And all the right title and interest of the said William Say George Mumford John Palmer Thomas Harris and John Powell as such Churchwardens and Overseers as aforesaid or therein in and to the same and every part thereof unto and to be holden by the said Guardians of the Poor of the Downham Union their successors and assigns for ever . In witness whereof the said William Say George Mumford John Palmer Thomas Harris and John Powell have hereunto set their hands and seals .And the said Guardians their common seal the day and year first above written .

Witness to the signatures of George Mumford John Palmer Thomas Harris and John Powell and to the sealing of the Downham Union . Edward Hett, clerk to the Union .

(Signatures of) George Mumford, John Palmer, Tho Harris , John Powell .

Transferred the sum of two hundred and sixty pounds by the Treasurer of the Downham Union in the books of account belonging to the said Union in an account entitled " The Guardians of the Downham Union of the counties of Norfolk and Cambridge "in the matter of the sale of certain hereditaments belonging to the parish of Downham Market .

D Gurney , witness Fra Cuperell .

Seal of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales .

(Summary on the reverse side) 18th January 1837 The Churchwardens and Overseers of Downham Market to the Guardians of the Downham Union .

(Typescript) Memorandum - By a Conveyance dated the 15th day of December 1972 made between The Norfolk County Council (1) and the Downham Market Urban District Council (2) of a piece of land containing about 0.890 of an acre and forming part of the within described property was conveyed unto the said Downham Market Urban District Council and their right to production and delivery of the within written deed was acknowledged and an undertaking for its safe custody given .

Meeting 14th Sept 1836

Your committee examined the several plans produced to the Guardians and decided upon the Plan of Mr Thorold and the Plans of Mr Donthorn as the most eligible for the Workhouse . Moved by Mr Kerridge seconded by Mr Wood that one of Mr Donthorn`s plans be accepted . Carried unanimously. That Mr Donthorn`s square plan return at a cost of £2,000 be adopted for the Union house . Carried unanimously . Moved that the Building Committee have power to alter Mr Donthorn`s plans to an extent not exceeding £120 and that they advertise for tender

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for the erection of the Union house . Moved that Mr Peckover of Wisbech be accepted security for Mr Gurney the treasurer and that they enter into a joint bond for the sum of £2,000.

Meeting Wednesday 21st Sept 1836

Moved that John Long be appointed Door keeper until further ordered . That the Clerk communicate to Mrs Doyle that the Guardians do not feel themselves justified to make any alteration in the measures they have adopted as to erecting a house on the workhouse land . At this meeting a request was produced by the Clerk from the inhabitants of Downham and their parish officers a request for the Board of Guardians to apply to the Poor Law Commissioners to allow the parish of Downham to sell their workhouse piece of land containing three acres .

Meeting Wednesday 28th Sept 1836

Proposed that George Kaywell Wilson a Lt in HM Royal Navy and now or late on board HMS Rodney be Auditor . Mr Wilson declared nominated .

Meeting 5th October 1836

The salary of John Long , doorkeeper, 5/- per week

Meeting 12th October 1836

Read a communication from the Treasurer of the Thorpe Lunatic Asylum for payment of several sums of money for pauper lunatics and requested payment by the Board instead of the several parishes . The Building Committee having retired to consult with Mr Donthorn and the Clerk of Works to prevent any works being carried out during frost . That the Contractor be informed to commence forthwith and that instructions should be given to Mr Donthorn . That the stair cases and windows should be of stone and NOT wood , the extra expense of which would be £84. That the fence to the front of the Boys and Girls should be iron not wood , the extra expense would be £60. That the water spouting conducting pipes round the house would cost £23 that two reservoirs for the water would cost £40. That as the site of the building the Contract should be delivered in according to the specifications and that any extra depth of foundation should be paid for at per rod . That advantage might be taken of the slope of the ground for cellars and other uses and that windows be inserted in the building for that purpose .

That fire proof floors , iron girders, and brick arches would cost £40 extra and your committee are of opinion that by insuring the building is rendered fire proof to the Board Your committee

Downham's Workhouse

A History by Elizabeth Howard.

recommend that £5,000 should be borrowed , that the time for completing the house should be left to the Committee and that the Clerk of Works ought to be here on 24th Oct and that it would be desirable to ventilate the house by Brick flues the probable expense of which would be £30 . And that the surgery should be in the store room and the store room the surgery and the skylight abolished .

Meeting 19th Oct 1836

Moved that the lowest tender (for the building) be accepted viz £3,532 . Mr Briggs tender of £3,532 was accepted .



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Meeting 26th Oct 1836

Read a letter from Mr Thorold requesting he be allowed for his trouble in making the plans for the Union workhouse . Ordered that the Clerk write that an allowance could be made . The Building Committee met at Wereham Old Hall and that it might be altered for the purpose

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required but it would be at great expense and cannot be recommended the Guardians accept the offer .

Meeting 16th Nov 1836

Read a letter from the Institute of Indigent Blind in Norwich that a pauper named William Chapman belonging to Fordham parish wishes to leave the Asylum and that he was intending to marry a blind girl . Moved the Clerk write to the Institution that if he will come back he will have to maintain himself or be confined to the workhouse .

Meeting 23rd November 1836

Read a letter from Poor Law Commissioners approving of the plans of Downham Union House with their observations thereon letter dated 21st Inst .

Meeting 7th Dec 1836

Moved by Mr Milnes that it is the opinion of this meeting that a rural police should be established . Carried unanimously .

Meeting 28th Dec 1836

Ordered that advertisements for Tenders for Hats, calico , strong grey cloth , worsted, stockings , flannel and sheeting be inserted in the two Norwich papers .

Downham's Workhouse

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Chapter Three



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Meeting 1st Feb 1837

Ordered that £2,000 be borrowed for the Union House .

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Meeting 8th Feb 1837

Ordered by Mr Bush that an advertisement be inserted in two Norfolk newspapers for a tender for coffins for the Union . That in the case of a pauper dying requiring to be buried by the Union application be made to the Relieving officer and that the Relieving officer take possession of the effects of the deceased .

Meeting 8th March 1837

The tenders for coffins were opened and Mr Thomas Bennett of Downham carpenter being the lowest tender . Moved that this offer be accepted . (Extract from a letter from the Board of Guardians to HM Principal Secretary of State for the Home Dept) " but by instilling into the minds of the able bodied the necessity of providing for themselves and depending on their own exertions the office of the Guardians have been most efficiently seconded by the high spirit and manly independence of the labourer as also by more kindness and consideration on the part of the employer . The usual applications for relief in the winter season have not been received the Poor well knowing they must depend on their own exertions and to have the satisfaction of expressing our belief that the Poor have this winter been generally and extensively employed instead of spending the time in Beer houses and other places of unprofitable resort . "

Ordered the suggestions made by Dr Kay be adopted and that Mr Donthorn draw up the specifications and plans of the same . Mr Donthorn draw up the specifications and plans of the same . Mr Donthorn delivered the following returns of the works required at £3,532 viz Depth of brickwork required and caused by the unevenness of the ground , £263 ; Forming the culvert part of the unevenness of the ground into into receiving it , and bathroom £200 ; Lowering the kitchen , scullery , pantry and larder, and workhouse floors to meet the ground ; standing steps and various items and sundries suggested by Dr Kay , £120 . Total £672 . Entrance gates , boundary wall, and contingencies and making roadway up to the Entrance , £295 Total £967.. Percentage to the Architect Mr Donthorn according to the terms of agreement £210 . Superintendent of works, £80.

Application be made to the Poor Law Commissioners for their consent to borrow £5,000.

Moved that the plans and specifications of Mr Donthorn be adopted in the Union House and that a request be made to the Poor Law Commissioners for their consent to the same .

Ordered that the walls of the Union Workhouse be immediately carried up level and that the works stopped be immediately proceeded with .

Ordered that the sum of £600 be paid to Mr Briggs.

Ordered that a committee consisting of the Chairman , the Vice Chairman , Mr Jonathan Flower etc , be appointed to ascertain the best method of fitting up the Union House and that

Downham's Workhouse

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they meet on Thursday fortnight to report to one another and on the following Thursday report to the Board.

Ordered that Mr Brown of the Downham Workhouse be directed to attend the Board meeting on Thursday .

Ordered that the Clerk write to Mr Briggs that it is reported to the Board by Mr Darley the workhouse will not be completed at the appointed time and that a request be made to Mr Briggs to proceed more rapidly .

Ordered that an advertisement be inserted in the Norfolk papers , the Bury and Cambridge papers and two London newspapers for Master and Matron for the workhouse to be elected this day 5 weeks the salary of the Master £80 per year and the Matron at £20 a year and also a Porter salary £25 a year and Board and Lodging for each and also for a chaplain at £40 a year . (Henry Harrison of the Oulton Workhouse, Wm Harvey of Thurston , nr Bury St Edmunds , George Fisher of St Giles , Norwich, Thomas Gosling of Diss , Thomas Muskett of St Faiths Union and Charles Wright of Chichester . Original applicants for the post of Master and Matron).

Moved that Dr Kay on his trip to Scotland engage a schoolmaster for the Union House at a salary not exceeding £35 a year.

Mr Darley reported to the Board that the Union House was going on very unsatisfactorily . Resolved that the Board proceed to view the same .



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Meeting 7th Sept 1837

Chairman reported to the Board that he and others had proceeded to view the progress of the house and the same was now proceeding properly .

Ordered that a contract be entered into with Mr Diver for lamps and tin mugs and knives that the soup cans be made according to pattern no 1 , Pints 2/- per doz, quarts 3/10d per doz , 6 doz of each several pint tin mugs 2/8d per doz and 8 doz knives and forks 9/- per doz.

Moved that the tender of Messrs Coleman for Bedsteads be accepted and they provide according to pattern 25 . Iron bedsteads at 14/- each , 5ft x 10ins x 2/- , Iron bedsteads at 15/- each 6`6" x 2`6" , 14 at 16/- for 8` x 3` , 15 at 17/- 6`3" x x 3` and that the hoop iron of each be made to every one .

Moved that Messrs Johnsons tender for sedge mats for beds be accepted . Ordered that a contract be entered into with Mr Harman for blankets at 1/10d per lb , the blankets to be made to size and order .

Ordered that a contract be entered into with Mr Ryley for Scotch Forfar sheeting at 5d 3 farthings per yard for single bed cases and for double at 4/- each and for bolsters single 12 1/2d each ditto double 12 3/4d each and for towelling at 5 3/4d per yard .

Ordered that a contract entered into with Mr Baker for cotton rugs at 8/4d at 2 1/4 and 2/4 at 8/11d .

Ordered that a contract be entered into with Mr Harman for flannel at 10 3/4d per yard and a contract with Mr Harman for shirting at 4d per yard .

Ordered that a contract be entered into with Mr Johnson for serge at 13 3/4d per yard 3/4 wide .

Ordered that a contract be entered into with Mr Hawes for shrouds , 4 doz at 1/6d , and to be in four sizes one of them the largest also for stout grey twist calico at 3 1/2d and also at 5 1/2d per yard .

Meeting 14th Sept 1837

Ordered that a contract be entered into with Mr Palmer for shoes with laces viz. Mens heavy highlows per pr 8/6d , mens heavy highlows ditto at 8/4d , mens lace shoes per pr at 6/9d , mens 2 types ditto , at 6/9d , mens , old mens , for house , and shoes, at 5/3d , Boys highlows whole tongues, at 7/5d , boys shoes 3 -13 , at 5/6d, 10 – 13 , at 4/6d . Womens highlows at 4./6d , Womens shoes at 4/6d , childrens shoes at 2/3d , childrens highlows at 4/- , childrens highlows at 3/- . The above to be of different sizes .

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Meeting 21st Sept 1837

Ordered that a contract be entered into with Mr Hawes for a supply of stockings , mens size £1.1.0 per doz , Pair womens ditto at 18/-, ditto Youths ditto at 14/6d , do boys do at 13/- , also for drilling at 9d and 4d per yard also for hemp check at 11d per yard , also for Hats mens size at £1.1.0 per doz , youths at 18/- per doz , boys at 14/- per doz , also for hats .

Resolved that a pair of blankets be ordered for each bed , a pair and a half of sheets , 36 yard of towelling , cotton rugs for each bed, 40 yards of flannel, 30 yards of shirting , 6 pair of each sort of shoes, 35 pairs of stockings , 60 pairs womens ditto , 20 pairs youths ditto , 35 pairs of boys ditto . I piece of dwelling(?), at 1d , and one at 6d . I piece of hemp check 1 doz of hats mens size , 40 yards of stout twist , 12 suits of mens clothes, 10 of lads, 14 of boys drapes , 1 piece of grosgrain , I piece of linsey woolsey , 2 doz of stays , 4 doz of handkerchiefs , 40 yards of serge .

Ordered that a contract be entered into with Mr Baker for the supply of mens clothes as per pattern at 15/- per suit , lads at 13/- , boys at 8/- per dress .

Ordered that a contract be entered into with Mr Johnson for grosgrain for petticoats and gowns ag 4 3/4d per yard also linsey woolsey at 1/21/2d , also for stays at £1.2.4d per doz , also for handkerchiefs at 9s 3d per doz .

At this meeting appeared Mr Bell of Downham Market solicitor on behalf of Mrs Poll , and represented to the meeting that he claimed compensation for damage done to her mill on the Howdale by the erection of the Union Workhouse .



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Meeting 28th Sept 1837.

Offers of Master and Matron adjourned also adjourned election of Porter . Sub committee chosen to see what damage has been done to Mrs Poll`s mill by the erection of the workhouse .

Resolved that the parishes of the Union be valued at 3d per acre and poundage on the buildings at 3/- (this not to include farm buildings) .

Resolved that the clerk insert in the two Norfolk papers for the tender for the building of a 7ft wall on the north east side of the Union workhouse land . Resolved that Mr Donthorns preparation to forward specifications of fixtures be accepted and that on the receipt thereof tenders for the same be advertised . Resolved that the beds be filled with long straw .

Resolved that the Board of Guardians subscribe third of the price of a clock and that if the other two thirds can be subscribed a clock be placed in the Union workhouse . Resolved that Dr Kay purchase books for the Union house at a sum not exceeding £12 to include Bibles and Testaments .

Meeting 5th Oct 1837

Ordered that the Clerk advertise for Deal tables and benches and fixtures required for the workhouse .

Building committee reported that the house would not be completed for some time and recommend that the Clerk give notice to the Contractor that the penalty for not having the house completed according to contract would be inflicted . The committee also reported that a boiler and oven ought to be fixed in the kitchen in lieu of the present one contracted for . That 6 doz trenchers at 5/6d per doz , ½ a gross of spoons at ½ d , hand bowls at 2/- and ½ doz bowls without handles .

Meeting 12th Oct 1837.

Resolved that a contract be entered into with Mr Scott of Downham for the supply to the Union workhouse of Dorset cheese at 42/- each , brown soap at 44/- per cwt , salt at 3/- per cwt , soda at 14/- per cwt, loaf sugar at 9d per lb, bastard ditto at 7/- per stone , treacle at 4/- per stone , rice at 2/9d per stone, starch at 6d per lb , mustard at 6d per lb , black tea at 2/6d per lb , green tea at 4/- per lb , vinegar at 2/6d per gall , groats at 9d per bushel , broom head bannister brushes , dairy brushes, bacon 6d per lb,

Resolved that a contract be entered into with Mr Bolton for the supply of good steer beef at 7/- per stone , steer suet at 7/- per stone, mutton at 7/- per stone, pork at 7/6d per stone .

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Resolved that a contract be entered into with Mr Bennett for the supply of American birch chairs as per pattern at 5/6d per ½ doz , and with Mr Langman for 4 windsor chairs at 6/- per chair . Resolved that a contract be entered into with Messrs Bennett and Goose for the supply and fitting up of the Fixtures of the Union workhouse .

Resolved that an advertisement be inserted into the Norfolk papers for the supply of coals , straw, potatoes, pails , milk, for the workhouse .

At the board meeting , the following persons appeared as candidates for the positions of Master and Matron , viz, Mr and Mrs Dakins , Mr and Mrs Pyle, Mr and Mrs Gostling, Mr and Mrs Harrison , Mr and Mrs Muskett, Mr and Mrs Wright, Mr and Mrs Farm, Mr and Mrs Bodger, Mr and Mrs Harvey , Mr and Mrs Chamberlain, Mr and Mrs Fisher . The candidates being put to the vote , there appeared to be 18 votes for Mr and Mrs Pyle , being a majority and they were duly elected at a salary of £80 and £ 20 . Resolved that they be allowed to fit up their own rooms .

Resolved that Roe be appointed Porter at £25 per year and that he be allowed the maintenance of his wife in the house , she making herself useful in the house .

Read a report regarding the damage , if any , to Mrs Poll`s mill . In the opinion of the Committee damage has been done to Mrs Poll`s mill and recommend that £100 be offered for the damage done .

Meeting 19th Oct 1837

Report of the building committee

Resolved that their committee is of the opinion that the house is very clearly completed in many instances but that the defects may be remedied without any hindrance to the house being occupied and that in the opinion of the committee the house although not finished may be accepted as soon as the necessaries and furniture can be got in .

Resolved that the committee are extremely dissatisfied with the inattention of the architect Mt Donthorn . Resolved that the architect be requested to attend the Union House on 26th October and that the committee meet here on that day and that the house is thoroughly examined at 10 o`clock precisely . Mr Donthorn and Mr Briggs being present agreed that the building should be forthwith completed and Mr Donthorn further stated that he did not consider any blame was attached to him as he had frequently given orders to Mr Briggs but that he could not get him to attend to them .

Resolved that a Diet table be considered at the next meeting . Resolved that books be ordered for the Union workhouse . Resolved that the Clerk write to the Poor Law Commissioners that the House would be completed in a week or two .

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Meeting 26th Oct 1837

Resolved that a contract be entered into with Wendell Wenn for supplying the Union with Wallsend coal at £1.5.0 per ton. Resolved that Robert Meadows supply the Union with Pails at £1.8.0 per doz. Resolved that the first 6 " of the wall on the east and north be made of concrete provided round stones are not used and that the clerk to the works look to this being properly done . . Moved that the tops and bottoms of the windows be embedded completely in the stonework . Moved that Mr Donthorn have power to put lead in the glazing of larger dimensions in lieu of embedding . Resolved that the issue pipes at the corner of the yards be of 3" piping and that the Cistern head be made larger . That the committee is extremely surprised at the inattention of Mr Briggs in not completing the pipes in the washing places . That water spouts not put up be immediately completed . That the Urinals expressly ordered by Mr Donthorn not done . That the handrails to the stairs are not done , that the glass windows be completed , that the walls are many of them not flushed up fair . That there is a great deal more work to be completed the Committee cannot account for the slowness of the contractor . That some of the brick floors are in an unfinished state . The Committee recommend that a regular water closet be fitted for the Guardians . That the fire range in the Board room be not removed though not of proper size or quality . Moved that Mr Briggs be not compelled to remove the defective slate in the stone cistern but that £25 be returned in hand . Read a letter from the Poor Law Commissioners that the Royal Exchange Loan Office had declined advancing any further sums to Unions but that the Treasury would advance a loan to the Guardians of £4,250.

Meeting 2nd Nov 1837

Resolved that a contract be entered into with Mr True for a fender for the Board room at £1.8.0 and fire irons at 9/6d . Fire irons for the kitchen at 12/- , scullery fender 8/6d , poker and fire shovel 7/6d.

Meeting 9th Nov 1837

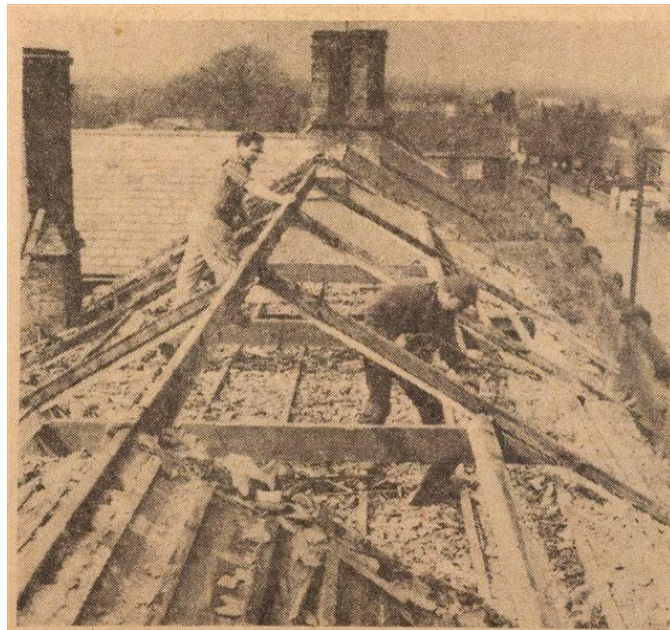
The Clerk reported that he had received a written undertaking from the contractor Mr Briggs to take possession of the Union Workhouse without prejudice to the Contract . Ordered that the Union Workhouse be insured for £3,000 . Ordered that the following system of Out door relief as suggested by Dr Kay be acted upon viz that on completion of the workhouse outdoor relief be continued and the following clauses 1) the aged 2) the infirm 3) indigent widows with families of children too young to work 4) indigent widows in the first 3 months of their widowhood 5) causes of accidents sickness and urgent need 6) that relief for paupers who are resident beyond the limits of the Union be discontinued except for the aged, infirm and sick .

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Meeting 16th Nov 1837

Read a letter from Messrs Colman and Glendinning that the iron bedsteads were ready ordered be forthwith sent . Ordered that they send mats to each bed . Read an application from Mr Briggs that an advance of £350 be made . Resolved that no further money be advanced except on the certificate of Mr Donthorn. Ordered that the following Prayer books and testaments by the Christian Knowledge Society , 6 prayer books for the aged octavo , 30 for the young , 8 testaments for the aged, 12 for the young, 6 Bibles for the aged , 5 for the young .. Resolved that the Building Committee and the Board of Guardians meet next Thursday at the Union Workhouse and that the Clerk request the attendance of the Architect to have a report prepared of the progress of the house at 10 o`clock precisely . Ordered that the east wall be raised 2 ft .



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Meeting 22nd Nov 1837

Meeting in the Board Room of the Union Workhouse . The building committee reported that the 28 beds examined by them had been found correct also the flannel sheeting and blankets . They had rejected the boys hats , the youths hats, also shrouds and hemp cloth as not according to contract . Report by Mr Donthorn states that the mass is finished but there are several little points to be done , overflow pipes , buckets in the well much too heavy , dining hall casements must be made to fit , gutter over the infirmary , stove in the Board room , chimney in the committee room , brick floors very uneven and need relaying ., ventilation to the ward over the laundry , iron rails to stair cases. It was agreed to accept the report that

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iron bars be placed in the windows next to the public road as required . Resolved that an advertisement be inserted in the Norfolk papers for a water closet and for what iron ware is required .

Meeting 30th Nov 1837

Read a letter from Dr Kay that he would wish to attend the Board in the house being fit for the reception of paupers.

Meeting 28th Dec 1837

Letter from Garneys Wales reporting that I certify that I have inspected the new workhouse and that all the rooms are fit for the reception of paupers with the exception of the north infirmary .

Ordered that the Refractory cells be made secure and the Dead House tiled and wall plastered

Chapter Four

Extracts from the Minute Book of the Board of Guardians of the Downham Union Workhouse from 1836.

Board of Guardians Minute Book C/GP/5/1 NRO



*Howdale Home Teaspoon
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Meeting 5th Jan 1838

No person has permission to see any pauper in the workhouse except between the hours of 10 – 12 and 2 – 4 . Resolved that paupers of sound mind and paupers who are disorderly be placed in separate apartments and that they have cold diet and are separate for 2 days . That persons of sound mind who are refractory be placed in the refractory cells and have cold diet during the whole time they are confined .

Meeting 18th January 1838

The Chaplain respectfully requests (the B of G) their acceptance of the Red Cloth and Lace fittings of the Desk appropriated for the performance of Divine Service in the Dining Hall .

Meeting 25th January 1838

Ordered that church catechisms , slates , pencils, writing books , and copies , pens , ink holders , doors for a cupboard in the school room . Ordered that tools of husbandry , knitting needles , tailors thimbles , tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, bricklayers tools be purchased £10 allotted .

Meeting 15th Feb 1838

The Committee are of the opinion that Mr Wales`s salary be reduced to £110. Moved that the Board pay Lynn Hospital £20 a year . Ordered that Mr Ross purchase what gardening seeds he may require and he submit a plan for the laying out of the land adjoining the House .

Meeting 15th March 1838

Ordered that Edmund Bacon be turned out of the House and that his son be left under the care of Mr Wales until he is well .

Meeting 26th March 1838

The Appointment of Maria Chamberlain to instruct the children in the duties of domestic servants . Application to be made to the parish of Downham for the price of the piece of land 150 foot in front of the Union Workhouse and in the event of the Guardians buying this land if the parish would sell the old workhouse and the site thereof and about 40 foot at the south end of the 150 foot .

The Rev Mr Bellamy requested the names of the 25 children alluded to in the pamphlet of the Rev Mr Musgrave as having never heard the Name of Christ .

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Thomas Bacon, 8yrs, St Germain's

Richard Norman , 6, Downham

Edward Chapman , 12, West Dereham

Thomas Barrows, 12, Magdalen

William Rungey, 12, Magdalen

William Welham , 10, Denver

James Rungay , 8, Magdalen

James Rogers, 11, Welney

Thomas Carpley , 5 , Welney

William Smith, 5, Denver

Mary Ann Edwards , 7, Denver

Martha Edwards, 6, Denver

Sarah Boyden , 5, Denver

Martha Smith , 7, Denver

Josiah Webster, 11, Denver

George Goodrum , 4, Stow Bardolph

James Griggs, 6, Magdalen

Elizabeth Stimpson, 7, Holme

Jane Stimpson, 5, Holme

Susan Clarke , 12, Holme

Ann Clerk , 8, Holme

Francis Clerk , 6, Holme

Elizabeth Rungey , 10 , Magdalen .

William , Joseph and Henry Pile , 10, 9 and 7 , Holbeach , under removal order from Downham .

List of Guardians elected 29th March 1838

Barton Bendish Mr James Bloomfield

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Bexwell Alfred Muskett
Boughton Simeon Steward
Crimplesham John Negus
Denver George Wood
Downham West George Pass
Downham Market John Dixon, James Horton
Fincham Robert Wright
Fordham Charles James Kendle
Hilgay John Lansdale Milnes
Holme next Runcton Rev F Edwards
Marham Richard Thompson
Roxham Michael Pattern
Runcton South William Cambridge
Ryston Thomas Brown
Shouldham John Bird
Shouldham Thorpe John Brakenbury
Southery Frederick Robinson
Stoke Ferry John Flatt
Stow Bardolph John Bath
Stradsett John Merry
Tottenhill Thomas Allen
Wallington with Thorpland Robert Green
Watlington Robert Porter
Wereham William Des Forges
Wimbotsham William Betts
Wormegay Thomas Curtis
Wretton Francis King

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Wiggenhall St Germans Jarman Patrick

Wiggenhall St Mary Magdalen John Whisler

Wiggenhall St Mary Henry Lane

Wiggenhall St Peter John Carter

Welney, Norfolk Rev Townley

Welney , Cambridge Gabriel Scott

Magistrates Guardians ex officio

Edward Roger Pratt, esq

William Bagge , esq

James Bradfield Sanders Bradfield, esq

Charles Berners Plestow, esq

William Lowton Jones, esq

Rev Arthur Loftus

Henry Villebois , esq

Moved that the several officers be continued in their offices for the ensuing year at the following salaries

Mr Edward Hett, clerk , £90

Mr Richard Salmon , Mr Thomas Negus Rose, Mr John Chamberlain , relieving officers for Downham, Fincham and Wiggenhall . £90

Mr Thomas Garneys Wales, surgeon to the Downham District Union Workhouse £130

Mr H B Steele, surgeon , Fincham District , £80

Mr Wm Johnson, surgeon, Magdalen district , £90

Rev Geo Musgrave, chaplain, £40

Mr Thomas Pyle , master, £80

Mrs Mary Ann Pyle, matron, £20

Mr William Ross, schoolmaster, £35

Miss Mary Chamberlain, instructor of female children £15

Mr Robert Roe, porter, and Mrs Roe, Assistant in the house , £25 .

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Meeting 26th April 1838

Resolved that the clerk write to James Parker of Denver to maintain his mother and father .



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Meeting 3 May 1838

Resolved that the order for Mr Rose for the admission of Elizabeth Pollard and 5 children be confirmed .

It appears to this Board that the conduct both of Mr Ross and Miss Chamberlain has been most improper and that Miss Chamberlain had been seen to come out of the bedroom of Mr Ross between 2 and 3 in the morning of Monday last .

Moved that Mr Ross be suspended and Miss Chamberlan discharged .

Mr Pyle being called into the Board room stated as follows " I heard about a fortnight ago rumours that Miss Chamberlain was frequently seen with Mr Ross. I spoke to Miss Chamberlain and cautioned her . I mentioned the matter to Mr Ross and cautioned him . He said if Miss Chamberlain would come she must take the consequences . Miss Chamberlain has frequently been in the schoolmaster`s room. I never saw Mr Ross turn her out of the room I have heard them laughing together in the room . Previous to Saturday night last I had no reason to suspect that anything improper was going on . I did not go into Mr Ross`s room on Saturday night but my wife did . On the Sunday night my wife appeared very uneasy and told me that Miss Chamberlain was in Mr Ross`s room . This was about 11 o`clock she told me she had locked Miss Chamberlain`s room door . I went to her own room and she was not there . I waited until about ½ past 2 o`clock and my wife got up and made a noise about and I heard a noise in Mr Ross`s room and as my wife was returning to bed, I heard Mr Ross`s door open and a short time after Miss Chamberlain came out . My wife followed her to her room . I have seen Mr Ross about the matter and he said he several times wished her to go out of the room

Downham's Workhouse

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, but that she would not go .. Since this Miss Chamberlain has been once or twice in to her room .”

Mrs Pyle being called said “ I went into Mr Ross`s room on Saturday night about 9 or 10 o`clock . Miss Chamberlain was standing by the fire . I said to her it was time she went to bed . She made no reply and Mr Ross made no reply . That on Saturday night I followed Miss Chamberlain upstairs and her clothes were disordered and in my opinion criminal intercourse had taken place .

Mr Ross being called denies that he has had any criminal intercourse and has frequently told Miss Chamberlain to leave his room .

Miss Chamberlain stated that Mr Ross did not tell her to go out . Mr Ross promised to marry me and Mr Ross never took liberties with me . ”

Meeting 10th May 1838 (with 24 Board Members)

The minutes of the last meeting relating to the conduct of Mr Ross and Miss Chamberlain were here read to the meeting and the letter from the Poor Law Commissioners to the Board and one from Mr Pyle to the Poor Law Commissioners were read to the Board by the Chairman .

Poor Law Commissioners, Somerset House, 8th May 1838

Sir, The PLC of England and Wales have received the letter of the Clerk to the Downham Union dated 3 May relating to the dismissal of Miss Chamberlain the schoolmistress and the suspension of Mr Ross the schoolmaster at the Workhouse at Downham .

The Commissioners desire to be guided by the Board of Guardians and accordingly sanction and approve their resolutions and determine that the functions of Mr Ross as schoolmaster are at an end . In reference to the evidence on which the decision of the Board is founded and in justice to all parties the Commissioners desire to draw the attention of the Board to the following letter received from Mr Pyle , Master of the Workhouse .

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Downham Market, May 4th

Sirs,

An Unpleasant Affair has happened in Our Union Workhouse respecting Mr Ross and the schoolmistress which has unsettled the whole house especially as Mr Ross is very respected by all inmates of the house and I have no doubt that this is a laid plot by the girl as she is reported to be in the family way before she came here . What leads me to think so is her always seeking his company and his shunning her and turning her out of his apartment . What induces me to take this step in writing to you is to prevent any hasty means to deprive him of his situation and character – as to the girl`s character it cannot be much hurt as there was a stain on it before she came here . I think it will be only fair to Mr Ross if Dr Kay to take the matter in evidence which I have no doubt it will finish in Mr Ross holding his situation and his previous good character .

I am , gentlemen, Yours respectfully , Thos. Pyle, Governor.

Resolved unanimously that Mr Pyle has taken an independent and incorrectly step toward this Board in writing to the Poor Law Commissioners without the knowledge of this Board and that Mr Pyle has therefore been reprimanded by the Chairman .

Board members voted 6 to keep Mr Ross , 20 against .

Mr Ross`s dismissal confirmed .

The Clerk to write to Dr Kay requesting his assistance in procuring for the Union an efficient schoolmaster and mistress from the model school of Edinburgh with a small or no incumbrance and a joint salary of £50 per annum .

Ordered that the order of the Chairman for the admission of Richard Matthews of Hilgay and Jane his wife, William Gounge of Fincham into the Union House be confirmed. The following

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letter from Mr Ross to the Clerk was read , " Sir, having resolved to quit this scene immediately and finding you were not at home , I have left in the hands of Mr Pyle , my account as it stands between the Board and me . By your presenting the same on Thursday and when paid , paying the amounts after reducing £2.17s6d., for the account Mr Pyle has at the Bank of Mr Gurney in Downham to be payable at Barclays Bank as I can then draw it immediately upon arriving in Edinburgh through my friends . You will exceedingly oblige your obedient servant Wm Ross . PS the money payable to William Ross`s account ."

Meeting 17th May 1838

Ordered that a contract be entered into with Bennett and Goose for a mangle for the sum of £11 to be 6ft 6ins long and 3ft wide.

Meeting 31st May 1838

It has been represented to this Board by Mr Pyle that H Fendike, employed as Cook in the Union Workhouse had feloniously taken away some meat and sugar out of the workhouse . Ordered that she be discharged and that her wages be at once be paid and that she be prosecuted for felony .

Meeting 7th June 1838

Appointment of Mr Dunlop and wife from Glasgow Normal School , (B of G) stated he had a larger family than they would have wished – the Board would prefer to receive a man and wife having only two children .

Meeting 14th June 1838

The Master reported that Elizabeth Clarke and 5 children had been admitted into the house by the order of Mr Chamberlain and Elijah Dammet by the order of Mr Salmon ordered that their admissions be confirmed .

Meeting 21st June 1838

Orders were signed consenting to the purchase of the pieces of land in front of the Union Workhouse at the sum of £100 .

Meeting 5th July 1838

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Ordered that the Clerk write to the Poor Law Commissioners appraising them of the arrival on Thursday week last of the schoolmaster and mistress, Mr Archibald Dunlop and wife .

Meeting 2nd August 1838

Resolved that Elizabeth Butler an aged and infirm person be allowed to go to Mrs Brown the Master of the Old Downham Workhouse tomorrow after dinner and return by half past 7.



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Meeting 9th August 1838

Resolved that Mrs Pyle be allowed to visit her friends for a fortnight .

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Meeting 30th August 1838

Ordered that Elizabeth Salter be allowed to go into service to Mr Page of Stow Fen ; to have 5/- wages and clothes . Ordered that William Linstead be allowed to go into service with Mr Smith, White Hart, as ostler, to have what he can make .

Mr Pyle reported that 4 of the boys viz J Cann, J Tufts , James Eggett and John Ollett had run away and that they had be returned except J Cann.

NRO ref C /GP. 5/ 2 .

13th Dec 1838 (C/GP/5/2)

" Moved an application to be made to the Poor Law Commissioners for an authority to apprentice out to shoemakers or tailors the following persons :- William Wellam aged 19 (an orphan and a dwarf) belonging to the parish of Denver . Henry Tingay , aged 13 (father dead mother dying of consumption) belonging to the parish of Stoke Ferry and Samuel Page , aged 13 subject to fits , (father dead) belonging to the parish of Watlington".

" Moved by Mr Press for permission to take into the workhouse for 3 months , two of the children of Robert Bushel of West Dereham a pauper at 12/- per week and at home family consists of himself , his wife, and 6 children oldest 9 years of age the wife expecting to be confined any day . Mr Press stated that he believed the family were starving and that they would not be able to get anyone to assist them in her confinement for want of means . (aged 76) "

" Resolved that the Poor in the workhouse have roast beef and plumb pudding on Christmas day ."

31st Jan 1839

" Resolved that the Board are very surprised that Mr Johnson has entered in his Medical book the family of Leator (Leates ?) Of Stow Bardolph cured of the Itch when they appears to be still very bad . "

7th Feb 1839

" Resolved unanimously that for the future the rules and regulations of this Board made 10 Jan 1838 to disorderly and refractory persons be strictly adhered to and that the Master receive no further authority . "

" Moved by Mr Reed that Mr Pyle for the future keeps a journal of all punishment conduct and transactions of this house so far as the paupers are concerned . "

" A letter dated 5th Feb 1839 from the Rev Henshaw presents to the Board that Henry Merry who died at Southery on 1st last was discharged from this workhouse and furnished with the

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sum of 1/- toward proceeding on a journey to Ditton in Cambridgeshire the poor man being otherwise destitute feeble and an invalid and that he reached Southery at the end of three days in a state of great exhaustion . "

" Mr Pyle and several paupers having appeared before the Board stated most distinctly that the pauper was not discharged but went out of his own account and further that Mr Pyle only a fortnight before he went persuaded him not to go out for the present and that in their opinion the pauper was able to leave the house . "



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25th March 1839

" Board of Guardians elected

Barton Bendish James Blomfield

Bexwell Alfred Muskett

Boughton Wm Steward

Crimplesham John Negus

Denver Capt Geo Wood

Downham West James Ollett

Downham Market John Dixon, Robert Steel Wright

Fincham Wm Hebgin

Hilgay John Lansdale Milne

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Holme next Runcton Rev F Edwards

Marham Wm Lang

Runcton South Wm Cambridge

Ryston Thomas Brown

Shouldham David Brown

Shouldham Thorpe John Brackenbury

Southery –

Stoke Ferry Robert Flatt

Stow Bardolph John Harrison

Stradsett Edward Newman

Tottenham William Allflatt

Wallington with Thorpland Thomas Butters

Watlington Robert Porter

Wereham Edmund Crowe

Wimbotsham Richard Garahan

Wormegay Thomas Curtis

Wretton Henry Townley

Wiggenhall St Germans James Patrick junr

Wiggenhall St Mary Mag John Whisler

Wiggenhall St Mary George Moncton

Wiggenhall St Peter John Hall

Welney , Norf Rev Townley

Welney , Cambs John James

Magistrates Guardians ex officio

Edward Roger Pratt, esq ; William Bagge, esq ; James Bradfield , esq; Charles B Plestow , esq ; William Lawton Jones , esq ; The Rev Arthur Loftus ; Henry Villebois .

April 1839

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"Ordered that if George Adderson does not take his children out of the Union workhouse he be apprehended and sent to Swaffham ."

April 1839

" Ordered that tenders be advertised for the laying of a tunnel from the Cess Pool on the south western corner of this house to the highway . "

May 1839

" The Porter for the future not to sell the swill and bones and that Mr Pyle sell the same and hands the amount over to the hand of the Treasurer . "

May 1839

" It having been reported that Maria Johnson an inmate of the House had charged Mr Pyle with improper criminal conduct . A charge having been preferred by Susan Addison of improper conduct to her by the Master Mr Pyle . A further charge was also brought against Mr Pyle that Elizabeth Fretwell was in the family way by the master . Charges were partly investigated and ordered to be taken into further consideration by the Board ."



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May 1839

" The Guardians investigated the charges brought by Maria Johnson and Susan Addison and also investigated the truth of the statement by Elizabeth Fretwell as to her being in the family way by Mr Pyle After the examination of witnesses the Guardians came to the unanimous opinion that the charges against Mr Pyle had fallen to the ground but that he had been extremely lax in the discipline of the house . "

May 1839

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" Ordered that Elizabeth Fretwell take her child Rebecca Fretwell belonging to West Dereham out of the house and if she refused to do so have an order made for the house . "

" Mr Milnes having read a letter from Mr Clive Auditor stating that he intended to investigate the charges against Mr Pyle . "

" Resolved that it is the opinion of this Board that the charges having once been investigated by the Board and of which investigation Mr Clive had notice , it is most extraordinary that a further investigation be attempted by Mr Clive in the absence of Guardians and Mr Clive have notice that the Guardians object . "

June 1839

" Resolved that Application may be made to the Poor Law Commissioners that Mr Pyle and Mrs Pyle be continued in Office until the end of the next quarter ending Sept next . "

June 1839

"Resolved that the Clerk take the necessary steps for pulling down the Old Workhouses in front of the Union Workhouse and selling the material . Tenders for £14 accepted Juler and Flatman .."

June 1839

"Read a letter from the Poor Law Commissioners stating that from the laxity of the discipline of the house under Mr Pyle the Commissioners think it is entirely inconsistent wit their duty to permit Mr Pyle to continue any longer as Master of the workhouse and that they therefore request that he may be called upon to resign his office at the Close of the present quarter and that if he should refuse to do so the Commissioners would then have no alternative left but to issue an order for his dismissal . "

July 1839

"Ordered that the boy Hill of Wereham go to Norwich for the purpose of having a wooden leg at a sum not exceeding 30/- . "

July 1839

"Letter to the Poor Law Commissioners ` the Guardians respectfully but earnestly hope that the Poor Law Commissioners will reconsider the case of the Master of the Downham Union Workhouse . The Board of Guardians having acquitted the Master of all charges brought against him are of opinion that alone the charge of laxity of discipline could not be sufficient – and grant Mr Pyle a further trial of six months . "

3 July 1839

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" Letter received from the Poor Law Commissioners , Somerset House. To say they will agree to keep Mr Pyle on to the end of the current quarter (they deem the period long) to allow the board to find a successor . " " Mr Pyle appeared and ordered to resign. "

August 1839

" Letter received from the Poor Law Commissioners to say they would not alter their opinion as to Mr Pyle`s resignation and could not permit him to resume the same ."

September 1839

" Candidates for the Office of Master and Mistress : Mr and Mrs King, Mr and Mrs Swann, Mr and Mrs Rose , Mr and Mrs Chamberlain . For Mr and Mrs Rose , 18 (votes) , for Mr and Mrs Chamberlain , 4, Mr and Mrs King, 1 . Further resolved that Mr and Mrs Rose should have 2 children with them but to pay 2/6d a week for one of them . Salary Master, £80, Mistress , £20 . Resolved that the Clerk advertise for a Relieving Officer . "

October 1839

" The Poor Law Commissioners approve the appointment of Mr and Mrs Rose at salary of £80 and £25 (as written) ."

" Ordered that the ceiling of the cooking copper be covered with wood, zinc or copper and that a tender for same be sent in . "

October 1839

" Ordered that a piece of wood be put on the top of the Cess Pool in the front of the workhouse ,

" Ordered that a man be employed to clean out the privvies ."

October 1839

" A check for coffins and funerals to Mr Pyle , £3.10.0 . A check for wine for the paupers to Mr Pyle , £5 7.8d . A check to Mr Pyle for labour mending clothes, £22 1.0. A check to Mr Wake for lunatics , £24 10.0 . A check to Mr Pyle for labour £10.10.0 ."

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What follows concerns the Denver workhouse , prior to the PLAA , in 1825 but is worth recording here to illustrate further the way in which the ancient parish care worked . A letter was sent on 7th Dec 1825 from Christ Church Spitalfields parish overseers of the poor , to Denver overseers. " We the churchwardens are requested to inform you that Charles Welham and family belonging to your parish , made application to us in consequence of his wife being very ill and no person to attend on her or children. We were under the necessity of taking her and four children into our Workhouse having obtained an Order of Removal bearing date November 12th 1825 which Order was suspended as her Life at that time was despaired of but our Apothecary now considers her out of danger and likely to recover . the husband states that he was ill some little time since and you sent him and family up relief , he works for Mr King , Pork Butcher and has eight shillings a week and his board – we submit this to your consideration whether you wish us when the woman is able to travel to remove her together with the Husband and children down to you , or reimburse the expense we may have been at. and let the man continue in the situation he now holds , we therefore solicit your early attention and Answer to this letter . Gentlemen , your compliance with the above , will much oblige (sic) Yours , most respectfully , Joseph Adkin churchwarden . "

Further to this , there is a Charles Welham buried in Denver July 1832 , no age given and a marriage of a Charles Welham to Mary Lubbock in Fincham , he is described as of Denver , in 1818 . There are four baptisms found for William , Elizabeth , Mary and Ann in both Denver and Fincham , between 1825 and 1832 . It is possible that other children may have been born in Spitalfields between the marriage in 1818 and 1825 , but that only 4 survived as of 1825 .

At almost the end of WW1 , this report written possibly in anticipation of the end of the war and the demobilisation of tens of thousands of men , wounded mentally and physically , and their impact on their families and the welfare system .

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The Daily Telegraph London , Thursday , January 26th 1917.

End of the Workhouse

New System of Relief .

A far reaching social reform is proposed in the report that has been presented to the Ministry of Reconstruction by the Local Government Committee on the Poor Law . Briefly they recommend no less than the abolition of the workhouse and the complete tranference of the functions of the guardians to other bodies uner the contdrol of the municipal authorities . Their main proposals may be shortly stated as follows .

Workhouse Inmates

Children of school age to be placed under the control of the local education committees . Lunatics and mental deficients to be placed in charge of the already existing Mental Deficiency Committees of county and borough councils.

Mothers with children , the aged and the infirm to be entrusted to the care of health committees based on the existing authorities , which look after public health , with some changes to secure economy and prevent overlapping .

Outdoor relief

Families in need of assistance to be in the care of District Home Assistance Committees under the supervision of large councils .

Able bodied men and women unemployed and in distress to be taken charge of by Prevention of Unemployment and Training Committees appointed by the elected councils , whose duty it will be to look after these persons as part of the general business of preventing unemployment and of fitting people to do the work they are best able to do

It is pointed out that the changes involved by the abolition of the workhouse can all be made without creating any new committees or sets of officials and that they will mean a saving in time as well as in the use of buildings some of which are overcrowded and some empty . For the proposals as a whole is is claimed that they are well calculated to dovetail easily into any scheme of social reform that may be established in the future .

Stigma of the Poor Law

In arriving at the conclusion that an end ought to be made of the existing system , the committee have taken account of sentiment as well as of facts . Popular feeling , which has grown stronger in recent years, is that working men and their families should not be forced to go to a Poor Law authority if they are in need of help . There may be no reason for this feeling where guardians and their officers treat the people with consideration but the feeling sprang up in the days of a harsh Poor Law system such as was pictured by Dickens and that feeling survives to this day . With sentiment , therefore the workhouse should go .

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But looking at the facts of the case, the same conclusion is reached by a different route . Poor Law guardians today , hard and well as they may work , are trying to do too much . It has been all to the good that in recent years they have paid so much attention to the treatment of sick persons , the care of mothers and infants , the education of children , the nursing and attendance of the feeble minded , the harmless lunatics and the aged persons , who all find a place in the general "mixed workhouse" . But on top of these duties there is all the work connected with outdoor relief , which takes the form of money , goods or visits by a doctor ; there is the work of looking after the casual ward , the only place both for the genuine working man who is out of a job and for the habitual tramp , who has been " on the road " for years , and there are a number of other duties such as the assessment of rates, the regulation of public vaccination , and the registration of births and deaths .

All these tasks , the normal work of the guardians are more than enough the committee contends for any single body of men . But they are not yet all Recent years have brought one social reform after another and someone has had to carry out the arrangements. As public feeling has been against any "stigma of the Poor Law " attaching to those services, the guardians have been passed over Independent authorities have been created to administer pensions, insurance , the relief of distress , separation allowances and all this time the guardians have gone on with their work , which often covers much the same ground .

Distress and Unemployment

With regard to the distribution and supervision of help given to people in their own homes , the committee remark that the advantages of bringing these forms of assistance into the knowledge of a single body are obvious Nothing is more irksome to the person who honestly asks for help than the stream of inspectors and philanthropists : visitors which at once beings to flow into his house. Nothing leads to more harm than the fact that a dishonest person is able to obtain help from half a dozen places at the same time because no single body knows what the others may be doing for him . Hence the proposal that the elected councils should set up Home Assistance Committees whose duty it would be to act as a centre of information concerning each families wants .

If the committees proposals were carried out the Poor Law guardians would , of course , disappear . It is therefore proposed that when the mass of duties which now fall on the guardians is distributed among the committees , provision should be made for securing the services of experienced guardians on the committees , and for employing or compensating Poor Law Servants .