

# BURIAL RECORDS & THE PARISH POOR

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I was looking at the Parish Registers for St Peter's Church recently and found some interesting entries dating back to the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century that puzzled me. The burials register records a number of young children who died and were buried in Woking, but who originally came from London. The first appears to be Richard Bromfield 'a nurse child from Westminster' who was buried on the 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1655, but from then on there are regular entries for 'nurse children' from either Westminster or London, and I must admit I don't know how or why such children came to be buried in our area. I assume that there were other such children who did not die, but what happened to them I do not know. Can anybody throw any light on the subject?

Another entry in the burials register that caught my eye was the case of William, the son of William Collyer of Hale End in Woking who was killed on the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1681 'by an oak falling on him'. Hale End was one of the tithings of Woking which covered the Westfield, Egley, & Hook Heath areas, but it was the name 'Collyer' that interested me. In those days a 'collier' was a person who made charcoal, so I wondered whether William senior practiced what is name implied and whether his young son was killed whilst helping him to fell an oak for burning. He was buried on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April, presumably after an inquest was carried out.

Such inquests more often than not were carried out at a local hostelry, where the parish vestry

The Bird in Hand at Mayford and the White Hart at Old Woking were often used by the Parish Vestry for their meetings.



also often met. The parish records note that the White Hart in Old Woking and the Bird in Hand at Mayford were favourite places for the vestry to meet, along with the church itself and the parish workhouse at Westfield.

Interestingly the workhouse also eventually became a public house (The Cricketers) after the Guildford Union Workhouse was built, but when the new public house was built to the side

in the 1930's (now an oriental restaurant) the old building was converted into a village stores and eventually a private house.

It is now a grade II listed building noted as dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, although when

The parish workhouse was at Westfield – a building later used as a school, later a public house, a grocers and now a private house.





Pubd. by G. S. Addison, Woking, a 911 | 207

### Woking Village

On the right-hand side of Church Street in Old Woking used to be some Almshouses for the poor of the parish. The buildings were probably incorporated into the village school, before being demolished in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The site is now a public car park and the entrance to The Cloisters.

the roof had to be repaired in 1911 the words 'built 1649' were apparently found inscribed in one of the rafters of the roof.

The other interesting feature of the property are the blocked up windows, possibly the result of the Window Tax introduced in 1696, although it is more probable that they were blocked in soon after 1782 when the tax was increased.

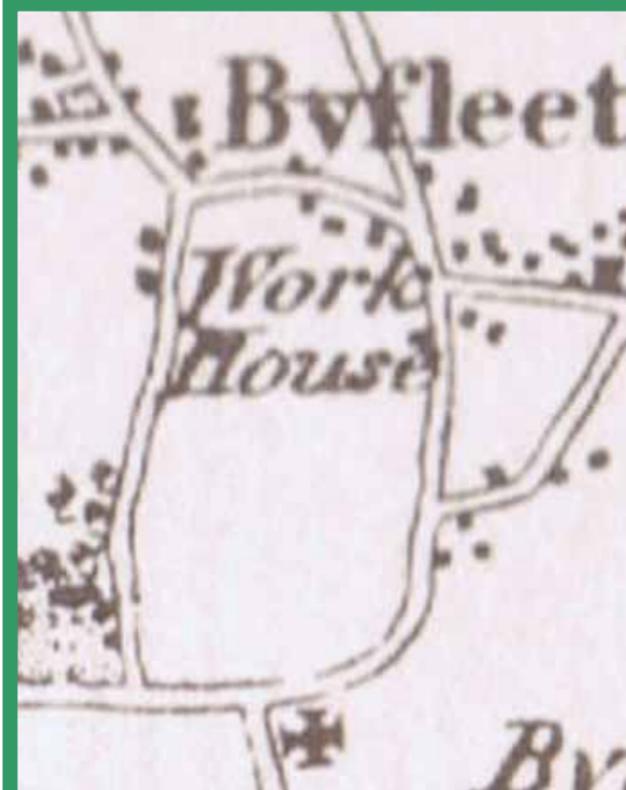
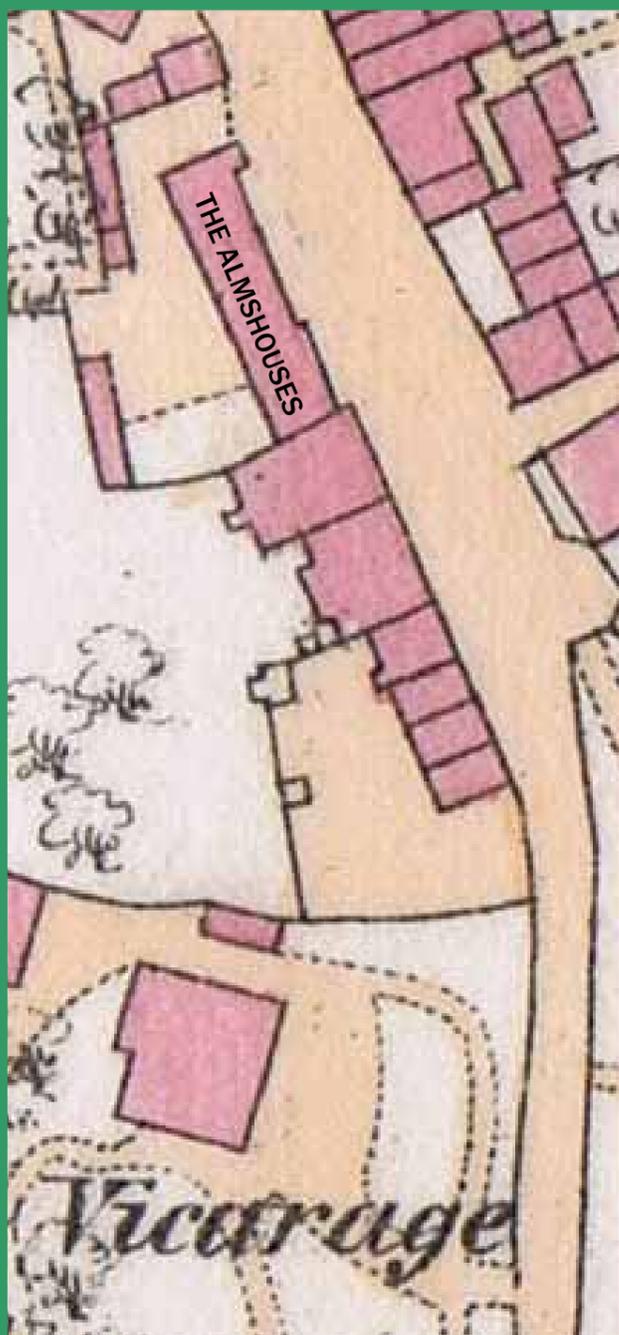
A number of entries in the parish registers record the death of the poor in the neighbourhood, such as Mary White a poor woman who was buried on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1670; Alice Heathcutt another poor woman who was buried on the 11<sup>th</sup> February 1673 and Mary Hildyerd, a widow and poor woman who is recorded in the burial register on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 1674, but one entry is a little more enlightening. It records George Fenn, a 'poor labourer' who was buried on the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1685 after being 'found dead in Brookwood'.

Sarah Sherrett was a 'poor maid' when she was buried on the 4<sup>th</sup> June 1673, and Richard West a poor man is recorded as being buried on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 1688, but the first person to be recorded in the registers as being 'kept by the parish' was Anne Seaman whose burial took place on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1698 at Woking.

In Horsell the Cricketer's public house was apparently once used as the village poor house (and lock-up), whilst Glebe Cottage at Pyrford served a similar function there.

In Byfleet what is now Rectory Lane was once 'Workhouse Lane' with the old 18<sup>th</sup> century pauper houses (right) being demolished in the late 1960's at the entrance to Stream Close.

Records for that institution survive from 1795 to 1830 after which the Chertsey Union workhouse opened in Murray Road at Ottershaw – taking the poor from the whole of the Godley Hundred.



# TRAVELLERS, TRAMPS & GIPSIES

This old postcard shows a camp of gipsies on Chobham Common, but there are records of such camps all over this area, with the wilds of Hook Heath being a favourite haunt even into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.



*Gipsies' Camp, Chobham Common.*

The Parish Records often note the death of gipsies or 'travellers' usually recording their full name, but sometime just noting their surname or even no name at all - such as 'the male traveller who died at Sutton in this parish as he wandered about, whose name could not be known', but who was buried in St Peter's churchyard on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 1675.

A decade later Henry Titcombe (described as 'a poor wandering child'), was buried on the

21<sup>st</sup> March 1686. Records of the birth of travellers are harder to find, but one is recorded in Woking in 1660 when William the son of William Ferris a traveller was born on the 7<sup>th</sup> May (and presumably baptised soon afterwards). It is a shame that the registers only record the name of the fathers and not the poor mother who, lets face it, did most of the work!

Another term often found in the parish registers is that of 'stranger', although just how strange to the area a person was is in some doubt. By

the late 17<sup>th</sup> century there were numerous branches of the Waterer family living in the Woking area, but on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 1686 the St Peter's Baptism Register records 'Elizabeth Waterer, daughter of Henry - a stranger'. Sadly the following month the burial register records her burial in the village too - perhaps Henry and his family may have originated from another parish in the area, with Waterer's recorded all over north-west Surrey.

## STEPHEN – THE DUCK THAT DROWNED

One poor man who found his way to Byfleet had an even more interesting story. He was Stephen Duck a labourer from Wiltshire who taught himself to read and then started to write poetry. When his poem 'The Thresher's Labour' was published it came to the notice of Queen Caroline, consort of George II, who made him the keeper of her library at Richmond.

Another of his champions was Joseph Spence, professor of poetry at Oxford who lived at what became the Old Lodge or Albany House at Byfleet. He persuaded his friend and employer the Earl of Lincoln to appoint Duck as the Rector of Byfleet.

Brayley, writing in 1850, noted 'the poems, which presented few claims to notice beyond the circumstances under which they were written, have long since fallen into oblivion' and added about his move to Byfleet 'the alteration in his circumstances appears to have had an unhappy effect on his mind; and at length in a fit of melancholy insanity, he put an end to his life, by drowning at Reading on the 30<sup>th</sup> March 1756.

Ironically his friend Spence also died by drowning, accidentally falling into a shallow pond in his garden on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1768, aged 70.



Stephen Duck, Rector of Byfleet from 1752 to 1756.