

Gnosall Workhouse 1836-1858 *(from Newport Union Minutes held at Shrewsbury)*

In 1834 Gnosall became part of Newport Union under the Poor Law Amendment Act, and was governed by a Board formed in Newport in 1836 to run Newport and Gnosall Workhouses and also Lilleshall Poorhouse.

The Board consisted of three members each from Newport, Gnosall (Rev. Fearon Jenkinson, Thomas Boulton, who was Vice-Chairman and later Chairman, and Mr Bentley) and one each from the other thirteen parishes. They met weekly and later fortnightly, and the handwritten book of minutes of their meetings is held at Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury, ref. PL11/4.

[The words in **bold** are to highlight subject matter; they are not bold in the original.]

The London-based Poor Law Commissioners sent them instructions from time to time, and it will be seen that the Guardians often found local reasons why they couldn't carry them out.

Gnosall Parish workhouse soon became a Poor House where children, the old and feeble and adults otherwise incapable of working lived. The Work House (for able-bodied adults) was in Newport.

Although London was trying to discourage "out relief" or "outdoor relief" – i.e. giving help in cash or goods to the poor in their own homes – in practice Newport Union, more pragmatic than London, went on allowing it until at least 1850.

The first thing the Newport Guardians did, meeting at the Workhouse and adjourning to the Town Hall on 6th October 1836, was to organise themselves and appoint a **Clerk** (Henry Heane) and a **Treasurer** (Shropshire Banking Co.) and plan for two **Relieving Officers**, one to live in the Workhouse at Gnosall and the other as decided. The Relieving Officers were required to act as Governor and their wives were to act as Matrons/Schoolmistresses. If the Governors happened to be unmarried, the cost of a Matron/Schoolmistress would be docked from their salary.

The **weekly allowance for the Governor and Matron** of each Work House was to be:

- 14 lbs raw meat
- 14 lbs bread
- 1 1/2lb of cheese
- 2 lbs of butter
- 4 quarts of milk
- 1 peck of potatoes

plus an extra £10 p.a. for all extras not included above and 1/6 deducted from Governor's salary for each child [because they eat less] - if more was wanted, the parents had to pay.

Henry Heane, the clerk, was instructed to buy stationery and it was agreed Mr Wilson and his wife (rather than Mr and Mrs Adams) would begin at Lilleshall Workhouse. Advertisements were to be put in the *Times*, the *Staffordshire Advertiser*, the *Birmingham Gazette* and the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* for candidates for Gnosall Relieving Officer and Newport Governor to appear for interview on 12th November 1836.

The Guardians thereafter moved their meetings to the comfortable **Union Hotel** (now the Royal Victoria), awarding themselves £8 p.a. for fire and candles. (The hotel was described in an 1832 advertisement as “newly erected” and boasted “a commodious bar, a magnificent ballroom”, four dining rooms, a commercial room and fourteen bedrooms plus coach houses and stabling. It had been renamed in 1832 but the minutes still refer to the Union Hotel.)

At their next meeting on 1st November, the **condition and rent of the proposed workhouses** were discussed. Lilleshall Poorhouse belonged to the wealthy Duke of Sutherland and needed repair. Mr Cobb was to inspect Gnosall and Newport workhouses for necessary repairs and rent assessment. (J & J Cobb of Chetwynd End were well-known builders of the time.)

Mr Bettelley – presumably Thomas - and Mr Phillips proposed that no relief should “be given to bastards of able-bodied single women unless they both go in the Workhouse”. (Mothers of illegitimate children, called “bastards” in the Minutes, were forced to go into the Workhouse; the 1834 Act had made it impossible for them to claim support directly from the father.)

On the **8th November 1836** the committee examined 45 paupers.

On **12th November** the Guardians had to decide between Mr and Mrs Adams, Mr and Mrs Bettelley (proposed by Rev. Jenkinson and Mr Boulton) and Mr and Mrs Pritchard, for Gnosall. The Bettelleys were offered the job and the Pritchards got Newport Union. [*Mr Bettelley was almost certainly Thomas Bettelley's son James*].

On **22nd November**, the Guardians received a letter from Mr Wilson at Lilleshall Poorhouse saying he had been violently assaulted on 13th November by William Adams who had scaled a wall and broken open a door. They agreed to take proceedings against William Adams.

Henry Heane was asked to write to the Poor Law Commissioners to ask if they could vary the **paupers' diet**. Different diets or dietaries had been laid down by London, and the Newport Guardians voted to “adopt Dietary 1 for the aged and infirm and Dietary 6 for the able-bodied.”

The following week Henry Heane was told to write and ask “if the husband of a woman who had had a bastard child before her marriage and who was married to her before the passing of the last Poor Law was bound to maintain such child.”

In **December 1836** two **Medical Officers** were elected, both from Newport, Mr Baddeley for the Shropshire part of the Union plus Forton (District 1), and Mr Lindop for the Staffordshire part (District 2). They were to be responsible for the health of inmates and recipients of outdoor relief.

The Guardians started looking for a building in Newport for the **Superintendent's Offices**. The Workhouse and Poor Houses needed regular cheap **supplies** and they accepted tenders from local suppliers of oatmeal (Mr Nicholson), beef & mutton (Pooler & Weates) and bread (John Gardner). Mr Bettelley was to supply potatoes, and Mr Lowe, felt hats and women's bonnets. Richard Whitmore was to supply coffins.

An advertisement in the *Staffordshire Evening News* in **December 1836** also asked for tenders for beef and mutton suet, candles, "firm yellow soap", "pease grey and white", tea, sugar and rice, cheese, salt, butter, skimmed milk and coals.

1837

On **10th January** the committee set about moving the individuals in the workhouses around to fit in with the rules laid down by the Poor Law Commissioners. This meant being sent from Gnosall Poorhouse to Newport Workhouse if considered **fit to work**, or to Gnosall or Lilleshall Poorhouse if not: so parents might go to Newport but their children to Lilleshall which was taking all the children at that time. Adults at Lilleshall unfit to work went to Gnosall and the able-bodied to Newport. Twenty-four people were named for compulsory relocation: amongst them Elizabeth Gates (widow) from Gnosall to Newport, and William Gates from Gnosall to Lilleshall. This could well be the woman who had wanted seed potatoes and "a pair of shoes for her lad" back in 1836, and her son.

On a kinder note, Henry Heane was told to write to the Commissioners and ask if they could substitute "**tea, butter and sugar in lieu of Gruel**" for the old people. He was also to point out that the official diet for the aged referred to *ounces* of potatoes when it must have meant *pounds*.

The following week the Rev. Jenkinson from Gnosall was in the Chair. **Six beds with sheets, blankets and counterpanes** were to be sent to Gnosall, several more people were admitted to the Workhouse or Poorhouse, one woman from Edgmond was paid 2/- a week to stay out of it, and outdoor relief – including clothing – continued for other people. A Woodcote woman was instructed to make clothes for the workhouse and Mr Pritchard in Newport set the women inmates to making clothing until he could find other work for them.

Every week the Guardians decided what to allow or refuse to various applicants, including the "outdoor poor" – Mr Bettelley and Mr Wilson were regularly given cheques to supply this - and the sad business of **splitting families** continued. On **24th January** it was decided: "Mary Gorse and her bastard child be admitted into

the workhouse and Sarah and Mary her other two bastard children into Lilleshall workhouse.” Meanwhile the Guardians organised the buying of land in Newport to build an office for the Superintendent Registrar.

31st January: “Mary Barnett and her children Ann aged 12, Richard 1½ year and Joseph ¾ year be admitted to Newport Workhouse and Esther 7, Elizabeth 4 and Jane 2 be admitted to Lilleshall Poorhouse”;

“Samuel Cartwright, blind and lame, be allowed 1/- a week from Christmas next”;

“Five cwt of Junk [old rope] be obtained from Messrs Fletcher and Riley of Liverpool for the use of the Union.” The point of this was for the inmates to spend their time picking it apart for oakum to use for caulking. This was a common activity in workhouses and extremely boring.

The Guardians continued discussing where to build their office.

7th February: the Shifnal Union Guardians had asked if they could send their children to Lilleshall School Establishment, but were told they couldn’t because of “the peculiar tenure by which the Guardians hold the House from his Grace the Duke of Sutherland”. Mr Blakemore had offered to supply wrapping for aprons for 7/- and this was accepted. A sub-committee was established to examine the state of the workhouse and poorhouses and “classify the poor properly in those houses”.

14th February: the women of the time wore **stays**, a sort of corset, and this applied even in the workhouse, although they sound rather uncomfortable: Mr Blakemore was asked to supply Barracan (a thick coarse fabric) at a farthing a yard, wood at 7d a set and stay-laces at 4d a dozen. Stockings were to be mended with “Jerseys” (probably a sort of worsted) and Mr Lowe’s tender to supply this was accepted.

Mr Pritchard at Newport Workhouse was get materials for the able-bodied poor to **pick oakum** and also “knives and forks and trenchers” [wooden plates – or would they have been cheap pottery so close to Stoke?].

Elizabeth Gates was to be moved from Newport Workhouse to Gnosall, presumably as she was no longer capable of working. She died within a month.

Thomas Hooper of Gnosall was to be supplied with a pair of blankets and Martha Royster compelled to support her grandchildren.

21st February: this week’s minutes see three instances of the Medical Officer being instructed to “diet” men who were outside the Workhouse but unwell and unable to support their families; the families got temporary relief until the breadwinner had recovered. In addition it was decided that:

- “Ellen Boss be allowed 1/3 a week, her husband having left her, and be allowed 2/6 to take her back to Longford near Derby.”

- "Mary Tinkle aged 9, dumb and a cripple, unable to work, be allowed temporary relief. Mother and child ordered to attend."
- Henry Heane was to send out **500 circulars** to local villages "so as information necessary may be obtained".
- A **stamp with the letters "N.U."** was to be obtained for marking inmates' clothing.
- The Guardians thought that an alteration in the paupers' diet would save money and give the paupers "a better allowance" if they **reduced the meat allowance and increased the potatoes**. They were to experiment with this and report back in a fortnight.

Chetwynd Poorhouse needed "immediate necessary repairs".

28th February saw more requests for help agreed, refused or discontinued. Several men had loans to keep them and their families going. In the case of two old men, their relations were to be made to support them - William Bradbury, aged 81, to be admitted to the Poor House - "take action against his sons to compel them to support him" (*this was not the publican at the Red Lion*) and John Pascall, aged 87, and his wife - "ascertain if he has any property or relations to maintain him".

The first of a series of tiffs with **local magistrates** was signalled: "Mr Heane to write to the Central Commissioners to ask if Magistrates are bound to decide cases of payments of rates by poor persons on their being brought before them by Overseers without summonses first obtained against defaulters by such Overseers, the Magistrates having refused to do so."

The Guardians decided to increase Henry Heane's salary.

March 1837

7th March: Mr Wilson at the Lilleshall Poor House was to order **books for the children's instruction**.

Newport Workhouse had already undertaken the change of diet for the inmates and found it satisfactory, so if the Commissioners agreed, they would carry on with it. Meanwhile the Governors of the Gnosall and Lilleshall Poor Houses would **reduce the meat allowance from 5oz to 4oz and double the potatoes from 1/2lb to 1lb** and report back in a fortnight.

Ann Dabbs was to have shoes and stockings out of the store.

14th March: The Relieving Officer of District 2 (Gnosall) - James Bettelley - was to be repaid for the **funerals** of John Stuker, Elizabeth Launder, Charles Wright, Elizabeth Bradbury and poor Elizabeth Gates - all of Gnosall. Mr Bettelley had also organised and was to be paid for the funerals of Jos Tilley and Shufflebottom (Adbaston); Mary Nagginton and Elizabeth Owen (High Offley); James Higgins and Sarah Cook (Weston Jones); and Ellen Roberts (Norbury).

Henry Heane was told to order one ton of Junk (old rope) for the use of the Workhouse and Poorhouse [picking oakum]. This seems to show that even the inmates of the Poorhouse (children, the old and the sick) were required to do some sort of work. In October 1838 the hours of work at the Poorhouse were limited.

21st March: Mr Bettelley reported from Gnosall that “the alteration in the dietary is perfectly satisfactory” i.e. less meat and more potatoes. It was to be adopted permanently and permission got from the Poor Law Commissioners.

Outdoor relief was now being given in kind as much as possible and so a store to keep it in was rented at 6d a week from Ralph Preston in High Offley.

On **4th April** the Guardians had found another puzzle to put to the Commissioners: Henry Heane was to write and ask “whether where a Bastard Child under the age of 7 years, where Mother was married before the passing of the Poor Law Act, the Guardians are compelled to give relief to such child where the child is residing with the Mother and her Husband out of the Union, or whether they cannot compel the Mother and Child to come into the Workhouse.” Perhaps the mother had applied for outrelief for the child if her husband would not support it.

11th April: Amongst more admissions, Ann Elliot aged 40 was sent to Newport Workhouse but William Elliot aged 5 to Lilleshall Poor House.

The following entry is interesting as it shows one of the past uses of the Poor House building on Church Street: “Messrs. Cobbs to put up a grate in **Gnosall Poorhouse** and repair the windows and do necessary plastering in that part of the House called the Weaver’s shop and repair the door if necessary.” [*The 1838 Tithe Map shows a long building with a small school attached*].

A number of **tenders** were accepted for supplies of bacon, potatoes, flour (seconds), cheese, oatmeal, candles, “groceries”, coffins, clothes, shoes, beef without bone and mutton with bone, hats and “Harper’s for Milk skim and fresh for one year”.

18th April: “Ann Baker to be admitted to the Poorhouse and her property to be taken by Guardians”;

- Robert Cadman and his wife were to go to the Workhouse, their two children to the Poorhouse;

- Robert Baker was to have a shilling a week toward “taking care of his Idiot Son”;

- Jno Jackson, Jos Townsend, Elizabeth Whithington, Henrietta Matthews (77), and Hannah Matthews (76) were to go to the Poorhouse;

- Jos Botts was to be supplied with a truss;

- Samuel, Elijah and William Stanley were to be compelled to support their parents.

The meeting of **25th April** had a lot of business - amongst other things:

- Thomas Davies, blind and wholly disabled, was to be allowed a smock frock

waistcoat and shirt;

- Mr Bettelley was to write to the Governors of "Woolstantion" to find out the earnings of James Frost's family on his application for relief and report to a future meeting;
- Joseph Dabbs was to be discharged from Gnosall Poorhouse for "refractory conduct and insult to the governor" and to be sent to Chetwynd Workhouse;
- three women were to be allowed "list shoes" (a sort of tough cloth) as well as bedgowns, petticoats and shifts;
- as instructed by Poor Law Commissioners, the Governors and Relieving Officers were to make **a list of paupers and put it on the church door**;
- Henry Heane was to write to the Central Board and tell them the paupers were better satisfied with the diet proposed by Newport Union than with the original one, and requested them to approve it. Since the meat was probably low quality and potatoes were more filling, this could well have been true.
- three men were to be moved from Chetwynd Workhouse to Gnosall Poorhouse.

May 1837

9th May: John Davies, wife Elizabeth, infant son and son John were to be admitted to the Workhouse and their daughters Mary Ann 10, Elizabeth 8 and Sarah to the Poorhouse;

- "Mary Williams 16 and her bastard" were to be admitted to the Workhouse;
- Elizabeth Felton, ill with cancer, was to be allowed 2/- a week;
- John Carter, ill with fever, was to be dieted by the Medical Officer;
- the Union had to pay £3 5s 0d to Stafford Lunatic Asylum for looking after a woman called Mary, and this would come out of out-relief money;
- the Guardians would fix outrelief at 1/6 per week except in emergency;

On **30th May** among other things, the Guardians discussed saving money by closing Lilleshall Poorhouse, getting rid of one Relieving Officer, and using the money saved to supply a horse for the remaining officer to cover the whole Union. Two weeks later they agreed to postpone a decision on this until a year had elapsed.

The Guardians had now decided to buy "Mr Pooley's house" for their offices and Board Room, and Mr Cobb was to submit necessary alterations.

Summer 1837

In **July** twin boys, William and Thomas Barnett, 19 months old, were to be removed from Gnosall to Lilleshall Poorhouse; the Colwich overseers were paid 15/- for this. Several other children with no parents mentioned were also sent to Lilleshall Poorhouse, but a young woman with a "bastard", presumably a baby, was sent to Newport Workhouse. The same day there was a decision: "Brew's two illegitimate children each to be supplied with a suit of clothes". [Can we assume that Brew was a man? It seems only women had "bastards"!]

Mr Parsons, the agent handling the sale of the Newport house the Guardians wanted for their offices, was refusing to hand it over until it was paid for, so Henry Heane was told to write to the Poor Law Commissioners and ask for an advance of £305. Meanwhile Mr Cobb was to be paid £100 on account by postdated cheque. "By that time the money will be received from the Exchequer Loan Office."

Later in July Messrs Cobb tendered £159 17s 5d for necessary alterations to the proposed Registrar's Office in Newport, and this was accepted. The Building Committee certified that Messrs Cobb's work on the Newport and Gnosall Houses was satisfactory, and the balance of £121 16s 11d was to be paid.

There was an outbreak of **smallpox** at Lilleshall Poorhouse, and in **September 1837** it was agreed to pay £1 per week to the nurse who had cared for the children.

On **24th October** it was noted that Thomas Hodgkiss had gone into Gnosall Poorhouse and not "**delivered up his Goods**" so the Gnosall Parish Officers were told to take proceedings to obtain them. Inmates of workhouses and poorhouses forfeited most, if not all, of their personal belongings, which were then sold by the parish.

On **7th November**, the Guardians decided: "That if Mr Addison Ash has engaged Henry Birch as a servant that a suit of clothes be supplied to him." Thomas Addison Ash was the farmer at Hollies Farm.

At the same meeting, the Gnosall Overseers were instructed to enforce payment due on Thomas Barratt, the putative father of Ann Sanson, aged 12, and she was to be admitted into the Workhouse.

It was now agreed to **close Lilleshall Poorhouse** as there was "sufficient accommodation" elsewhere for the children, and a special meeting was called for the end of the month to discuss what to do with them.

21st November's meeting had two items relating to Gnosall:

- "Eliza Vernon 22 another bastard parish Gnosall be admitted to the Workhouse;"
- "That a frock, a pinafore and a shift be supplied to Susanna Lees parish Gnosall."

The special meeting called about Lilleshall is not in the Minutes book, but on **12th December 1837** it was agreed that **Gnosall Poorhouse in Church Street should be made ready for the influx of children from Lilleshall:**

"That a Grate be upon the Old Mill Room, the floor laid which requires laying, the room whitewashed in Gnosall Poorhouse and such other matters done at Gnosall Poorhouse which may be requisite for the reception of the children; that the Rev Mr Jenkinson be requested to superintend the same and give the necessary orders."

[Henry Heane was a solicitor and sometimes leaves out all the punctuation, which I have added here. The entry shows another past use of the building – some kind of mill.]

The Guardians politely handed back Lilleshall Poorhouse to the Duke of Sutherland's agent, Mr Smith.

The Governors' wives, Mrs Bettelley and Mrs Wilson, were told to appear for examination on 16th December.

On **19th December**, it was agreed the Bettelleys should continue at Gnosall, with Mrs Bettelley now being the schoolmistress there, and the Wilsons would take over at Newport Workhouse. There was a case of measles which the Medical Officer was to see to.

1838

Gnosall Poorhouse now had to be adapted to take all the children from Lilleshall Poorhouse:

January

On **9th January** Mr Day for the Poor Law Commissioners had suggested alterations to the Poorhouse, and Messrs Cobb were to estimate the costs of these;

- Mr Bettelley was to obtain a chamber broom, a wash hand bowl, a deal table, a tea kettle, a bucket and two clothes horses for Gnosall Poor House;
- Books from the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge were to be obtained by the Rev. Mr Lloyd for the use of the Poor House.
- Meanwhile the mattresses at Lilleshall Poor House were to be taken to Newport Work House by the able-bodied paupers (on foot, presumably: about three miles) and Mr Pritchard was to obtain some rugs.

On **25th January** more decisions were made about **oakum picking**. It was agreed to accept "the offer of the Old Park Company to take the oakum at 27/- per hundred if the Union will take ropes according to the sample now produced at 15/- per cwt free of carriage be accepted." Old Park was a large ironworks at Wellington. The plan presumably was to have old rope delivered to the workhouse to be returned as oakum to the company.

It was also agreed to pay the Shrewsbury Canal Company £5 7s 3d for [old] ropes.

The oatmeal supplied by Mr Nickisson was to be returned and one load at 37/- ordered.

20th February: preparations for the children continued. It was agreed to order "1lb of worsted, two pieces of tape, twelve yards of blue cotton for girls, 20 yards of calico for children's shirts and shifts, 1/4lb of brown thread, and a clothes brush".

There was a dispute going on with Lilleshall Parish who wanted a quarter's rent for the Poorhouse. Mr Day for the Poor Law Commissioners had recommended the

Guardians pay half “although Lilleshall parish had no legal claim to it”.

A door was to be put at the foot of the staircase in the sick room at Newport Work House and not be removed.

March 1838

6th March: A Gnosall woman was reported by the Medical Officer of Stafford Union to be capable of being removed from Stafford Asylum, and the Constable of Gnosall was to go and fetch her.

Since “James Johnson’s bastard child” was chargeable to the Parish of Gnosall, the Overseers must enforce the maintenance order against him.

13th March: there had been a slip-up - “Instead of two shirts ordered last week to be given to Thomas Harrow, two sheets be given.”

Messrs Cobb were to whitewash Newport Workhouse and Gnosall Poorhouse; and more lavishly, Messrs Cobb were to have the woodwork at the New Board Room and Register Offices (in Newport) painted with two good coats of paint.

From 27th March, the Governors would meet fortnightly.

20th March: Mr Bettelley was requested to go to Bilston and fetch the three children of Widow Pickstock who had recently died, unless their grandfather Mr Challenor would fetch them.

The Governors would now meet in their new Board Room and Mr Brown and Henry Heane were to get the necessary furniture.

27th March: there had been resentment at having to bear the cost of burying other parishes’ paupers and it was decided that “from and after today **no coffins or funeral fees be allowed to paupers residing in parishes outside this Union** because this Union is forced to bury paupers of other parishes not included in this Union who may be visiting and may die herein.”

The Guardians furthermore decided that: “No coffin be allowed for Widow Nagginton’s child and 1/6 a week be taken off her pay.”

- and, “that from and after this day in new cases **no outrelief be given to any outlying paupers or to paupers not belonging to this Union**, and that in all cases of application for relief on its being ascertained that the paupers so applying do belong to this Union, that the parish from which such application is made, be requested to send such paupers to this Union without the expense of an order of removal and that all Unions be requested to adopt a similar plan with regard to this Union.”

Having sorted that out, the Guardians agreed to pay Messrs Cobb £100 for their work on the New Board Room and Register Office, and ask them to supply three tables, two dozen chairs, and fire irons and fenders.

On **24th April** it was agreed that the Magistrates, who had asked if they could use the new room at the Board's Newport house, were to be told they couldn't.

A store of flour, cheese and butter proportionate to fortnightly wants was to be kept at the Workhouse for distribution in out relief via tickets.

There is a baffling minute as follows: "The Committee's Report about the Yard at [name missing] by which the Rev. Mr Jenkinson is to be allowed the soil on his finding the gravel be put into effect under the Committee's superintendence, a corner of the garden being reserved." This may be something to do with the small garden at Gnosall Poorhouse.

The Rev. Mr Jenkinson (of Gnosall) was to purchase 24 cwt of cheese for the use of the Houses of the Union.

8th May:

It was agreed to receive and adopt the Visiting Committee's report on **the proper classification of the poor at Gnosall;**

- that the room the Committee recommended the Governor and Matron use at Gnosall Poorhouse "be properly coloured and put in a proper state for them";
- that the House with the Guardian's Boardroom and the furniture in it be insured for £250;
- that the fan light over the door (at the Boardroom House presumably) be altered by Messrs Cobb.

19th June:

Mr Lee's tender for £5.10s was to be accepted "for painting with two coats of paint the inside and outside of Gnosall Poorhouse and also his tender for zinc spouting at 5c per foot."

17th July:

The Poor Law Commissioners had instructed the Guardians to appoint a chaplain each for Newport Workhouse and Gnosall Poorhouse.

August – Improvements requested at Gnosall Poorhouse

James Bettelley and his wife were evidently not happy with the state of Gnosall Poorhouse and requested various improvements. The arrival of the children from Lilleshall Poorhouse – which would have included some originally from Gnosall - must have put pressure on space and it's obvious James Bettelley wasn't happy with the room he was left with for his personal use. An inspection was made

and a report made in the minutes on 18th August as follows. [The italicised lines are the committee's responses to the Bettelleys' requests.]

"1838 August 2nd

The following Gentlemen having met at the Gnosall Poorhouse according to appointment this day being members of the committee, Mr Boulton, Mr Jenkinson, Mr Chapman and Mr Lloyd. The following resolutions were adopted:

1. Guardians are requested to look at Ceiling in School Room. If it falls it will kill or injure some of the Children, it is unquestionably insecure.
School Room Ceiling to be made secure by a piece of wood
2. School Room Windows or some of them should be made to open
It is considered that the Windows that now open are sufficient
3. Garden Wall should be coloured
Garden Wall should not be coloured
4. Something was said about Window in Outer wall to light Staircase.
A Window in Outer Wall to light the staircase be made
5. Some Horsehair Mattresses are much wanted
New Mattresses to be made
6. Windows should be leaded, they are bad
Windows should be new leaded where wanted. Mr Lord of Gnosall to send in an estimate by the next Meeting of the Guardians of the repairs wanted
7. Pump Spout to be turned
Pump Spout to be turned as well as Cistern
8. The Committee will be pleased to consider and inform the Matron which Room they will select as a store Room when the intended Rooms are taken from the Governor for it is beyond his capacity to do so.
The first room on the right hand will be made into a store Room
9. There is but one able bodied woman beside the Girl Hampden whose period of remaining depends upon her parents to assist in the management of near fifty persons for the others are mere Ciphers which is enough to kill a horse much more a Woman as two of the children are extremely filthy in their habits
The question of the able bodied assistance required is postponed until the next Meeting of the Board of Guardians at Newport
10. The Poor House yard to be levelled by J Husselly of Bromstead under the directions of the Reverend Mr Jenkinson

The brick Causeway adjoining the House to be taken up and relaid. A proper quantity of gravel to be laid on the surface of the Yard. The gravel to be drawn under Mr Jenkinson's directions the price per cart load with 8 Horses to be 2/- [10 new pence] The back passage to Poorhouse to be paled off from the adjoining passage The Ash House to be built 8 feet from the adjoining building "about four yards of brickwork"
The Roof of School Room to be cleared of Moss and tiles to be put in where needed.

James Bettelley had also privately written to the Poor Law Commissioners about his grievance at having a room taken off him (No. 8 above), and Mr Day for the P.L.C. reported this to the Newport Guardians: "he had stated that the Guardians were about to take away from him the only habitable Room in the Poor House."

It was ordered "that **Mr Bettelley be publicly reprimanded by the Chairman** for his representation to the Poor Law Commissioners that the Board were about to take away from him the only Room that was fit for him to sleep in the Gnosall Poor House without acquainting the Board of Guardians with the fact of him having done so."

James Bettelley was "also censured for the disrespectful tone of his observations used in his Memoranda left for the Visiting Committee on Thursday 2nd August."

25th September:

In response to the direction from London to appoint chaplains, the Guardians replied that this was unnecessary. In Newport the inmates could walk to church attended by the Master, and:

"The Poor House at Gnosall being situated within 100 yards of the Parish Church of Gnosall and the Reverend Mr Jenkinson the minister of the Parish having offered to attend at the Poor House at least once a week, the Guardians do not consider it necessary to appoint a paid chaplain and it is hereby ordered that all poor persons in the House belonging to the Church of England who are capable of divine worship do regularly attend on Sundays accompanied by the Governor."

In addition, it was ordered that "the Parish Officers of Gnosall and the Relieving Officers do have John Hampston taken before the Magistrates as an idle, drunken and disorderly person to be dealt with according to law."

9th October 1838

At this meeting it was agreed "that the paupers in the Gnosall Poor House be only employed at work from 9 in the morning till 12 and from 2 in the afternoon till 5 in the Evening and that in the intermediate hours they be allowed to walk in the yard."

December

It seems **James Bettelley** had annoyed the Guardians irretrievably. In December

1838 the Board called a special meeting to discuss “the conduct of Mr Bettelley the Relieving Officer of the Gnosall District in not paying over a sum of £1.0.0. credited by the Norbury liberty in the quarter ending Lady Day as well as for not paying over a sum of £21.0.0. entered in his accounts as paid which still remained due to the Lunatic Asylum on account of the Gnosall pauper lunatics.”

Probably he had just got behind with his accounts but he was **dismissed** on 18th December and his wife resigned as Matron. Mr Wilson from Lilleshall took over the Poorhouse at Gnosall temporarily.

Following the dismissal of Mr and Mrs Bettelley, the Guardians instructed Henry Heane to advertise in the *Staffordshire Advertiser* for replacements. On 22nd December 1838 this advertisement appeared: “WANTED, a Man and his Wife, without incumbrance, capable of fulfilling the offices of GOVERNOR and MATRON of the Gnosall Poorhouse. The Governor will also be required to act as Relieving Officer of District No 2 of the Newport union. Salary £60 per annum Board and Lodging”. It added pointedly, “No Persons need apply whose characters will not bear the strictest scrutiny, and who are not perfectly competent to fulfil the duties which belong to the respective situations.” The Guardians would select from the testimonials those they wished to interview.

It was **John and Mary Hawkins** who got the job. Apparently there were still problems with the Governor’s bedroom because the following June the Governors agreed to have a lock and latch put on it.

1839

Things settled down to more of a routine after this, so only unusual minutes will be mentioned:

On **10th June**, it was decided to get a Slipper Bath for Newport Workhouse (a bathtub with a high rising back). Gnosall got one the following year.

Messrs Cobb were told to build a place in the Workhouse for giving out-relief where the inmates couldn’t contact the outdoor recipients.

On **24th June** it was ordered that “a lock and latch be put on the Gnosall Governor’s Bedroom”.

On **27th August**, Henry Heane was told to obtain a copy of “**the New Bastardy Act and Poor’s Case Act** [?]” for his own use. [The “bastardy clauses” of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 had made it almost impossible for mothers of illegitimate children to get support from the father – such cases had to be heard at county Quarter Sessions and could only be initiated by Overseers or Guardians. They also needed strong proof. In 1839, the hearing of the cases was brought back to local magistrates at petty sessions and in 1844 the clauses were overturned by a new

Act.]

At the same meeting, the Gnosall Overseers were told to summon John Moore to support his grandchild.

1840

Entries for this year concerning Gnosall include a decision in **January** that a Slipper Bath be provided for the Poor House and one in March to reduce Widow Badger's pay.

In Newport, Harriet Dyke "absconded from the Work House taking with her the Work House dress and also a Gown Shawl and bonnett belonging to another pauper in the House" in **February** and it was ordered she be arrested and prosecuted.

In **March**, there was a case of **medical negligence**. William Allman died allegedly from the neglect of the Medical Officer of District 1. An extraordinary meeting was called which agreed the death had resulted from want of attention on the Medical Officer's part and they hoped it wouldn't happen again.

1841

In **August** it was agreed to get a **furnace** for Gnosall Poor House.

In **December**, it was decided to provide a nurse to "to attend to the women who have fits" at Newport Workhouse, and that they should be kept separate from the others. The men's working room at Newport was to have a church stove and the room kept ventilated.

1842

An order came in from London in April to **appoint another Medical Officer**, but the Guardians argued that although the acreage was large, the population was small, and it was unnecessary.

In **June**, Henry Heane was told to write and say that there weren't any other qualified Medical Officers anyway.

In **July** the Guardians agreed to oppose "certain clauses" in Lord Ashley's bill against the employment of boys under 13.

By **August** the Guardians were running out of space – there had been an increase in paupers and the Workhouse was full. Henry Heane was ordered to find an extra building. **The Gnosall Churchwardens offered the use of a house and premises rent-free in Gnosall, and this was accepted.** (Does anyone know where this was?)

There was also now at extra house in Newport, and 15 double and 15 single iron bedsteads were to be ordered for this, as well as other necessary materials.

The Poor Law Commissioners in London had continued to insist the Guardians appoint another Medical Officer and the Guardians retorted as follows:

“The Chairman and Guardians are sorry that any difference of opinion should exist between themselves and the Commissioners respecting the Medical arrangement but having after mature consideration formed their opinions on the 19th day of April last a copy of which Minute was transferred to the Commissioners, they deem it unnecessary to enter into the consideration of the question and they beg respectfully to again refer the Commissioners to that Minute.”

In **October**, it was agreed to advertise for **meat** again:

Beds & Rounds of Beef with Bone at per lb
Sticking pieces & chucks with the horn end cut off with bone at per lb
Suet at per lb
Mutton at per lb

In **December** the Guardians ordered that Tramps be employed for two hours only at work after breakfast.

1843

In **March** it was decided to **split the Union into three**:

1. Newport, Chetwynd, Forton, Adbaston, High Offley, Weston Jones. Salary £50 pa
2. Gnosall, Norbury, Hochton, Woodcote, Chetwynd Aston. £50
3. Edgmond, Lilleshall, Longford, Church Aston, Tibberton, Cherrington, £40

Mr Duncafe was to be Medical Officer of No 1, Mr Lindop of No 2 and District No 3 to be advertised. The Poor Law Commissioners had carried their point about the third Medical Officer.

Two women were causing trouble – Ann Jones was ordered to be sent to jail for refractory and disorderly conduct, and Eliza Hampton had been changing her mind about leaving the House – if she did it again, she was to be punished.

In **April** perhaps because of overcrowding, it was ordered to “ascertain which of the Paupers other than Able bodied can be placed on Outdoor relief” at Newport “and that they do at once place them on Outdoor relief.” Messrs Wedge, Bentley and *Tuonce* (?) were to do the same for Gnosall.

In **May** it was decided that “the **Suet pudding day at Gnosall Poor House** be on Sundays instead of Fridays so that the Poor thereby may be the better enabled to

attend Church and that the Meat days be had on Fridays instead of Sundays.”

In Newport, Henry Heane was to look for “temporary accommodation for the Tramps so as to make more room in the House”.

The Commissioners had apparently written telling the Guardians they must make the recipients of relief work. Henry Heane was asked to reply “and inform them that from the local nature and character of the country it is utterly impossible for the Guardians to find employment and to suggest to the Commission the propriety of their sending an Assistant Commissioner when the Board will call a special meeting at which he could attend and the subject might be discussed.”

In **June** there was an attempt to find extra work at Lilleshall: it was agreed: “that Mr Smith Agent to the Duke of Sutherland be applied to on behalf of the Guardians of this Union to ascertain if his Grace will consent to allow 10 or 20 Acres of his land to be let to the Guardians to be trenched by the Parishioners and able bodied paupers now unemployed in Lilleshall Parish.”

The Medical Officer dispute with the Commissioners simmered on; they didn’t approve of the Medical Officer for District 3 (Lilleshall) being on a lower salary. In **July** Henry Heane was told to write and inform them “that the Salaries for the Medical Men for Districts 1 & 2 were made more in amount because the acreage was not only considerably more than No. 3 but in each of those Districts there was a Workhouse.”

The same month, after an extraordinary meeting, it was agreed to take Cinder Hill from the Lilleshall Company and employ the outdoor paupers breaking stones. George Davis of Donington Wood was to supervise them.

In **October** the Guardians decided that all Tramps applying for relief be first examined by the Police.

In **November** the Board, noting how efficiently Mr Hawkins at Gnosall performed his dual duties as Governor and Relieving Officer, unanimously decided to cut costs by **getting rid of the Newport Relieving Officer**: “as the Governor of the Poorhouse of Gnosall very efficiently performs the office of Relieving Officer of District No. 2, it is considered that the Governor of the Newport Workhouse may as easily perform the duties of the Relieving Officer of District No One.”

1844

In **May**, it was decided “that the Police Officers and Constables be instructed to search all vagrants applying for relief and make them give proper account of themselves, which unless they can do that the Police or Constables do forthwith carry them before the Magistrates and get them committed as vagrants.”

In **June**, the Guardians decided that an unnamed vagrant “be taken before the Magistrates for tearing his clothes to be dealt with according to law.”

In **August** it was agreed that Mr Hawkins at Gnosall could get **Spelling Books** for the use of the Poor House children.

1845

In **October** it was decided to get a “Kibble Mill” for Newport Workhouse.

In **December** it was ordered “that Messrs Boulton & Belcher do make such arrangements as may be necessary for erecting **Walls between the Privies at Gnosall** and making such other alterations as may seem necessary.”

1846

In **May** the Guardians decided to have the Workhouses whitewashed and other necessary repairs done.

There had been a dispute between the parishes of Gnosall and Wrockwardine about the Sarah Bradbury’s transfer to Gnosall. It was heard by **magistrates at Hay in August** and they demanded Henry Heane produce the Union Books for them. He refused to do this and they threatened to imprison him. In September the Board recorded “their perfect approval” of the clerk’s action and regretted the magistrates’ attitude. This resolution was to be sent to the magistrates and to the Poor Law Commissioners.

In **October 1846**, the Guardians agreed to discuss what to do about the “outlying poor” (poor from parishes outside the Union) as other Unions were now refusing to help paupers from within Newport Union.

Some decisions to **help Gnosall Poorhouse** were taken: “a dozen pair of Ironbedsteads be ordered by the Clerk for Gnosall Poorhouse”:

- “**two able-bodied women be sent from Newport to Gnosall**, the Board considering that there is not at present sufficient help there”; and

- “that the **following repairs be done at Gnosall viz**

The house to be spouted

A new Cistern to the pump

A new table in the Children’s Room

New steps to the door

And one coat of paint to the inside and outside.”

In November it was decided to **discontinue relief to “paupers not resident in the Union”**; and to charge relief to those resident in the Union to their respective parishes.

1847

In **January** it was agreed to appoint a **schoolmaster or mistress** to Gnosall Poor House, and March **Mrs Selman** was appointed "Schoolmistress to the children at Gnosall Poorhouse at £20 p.a. out of the house she finding herself everything".

In **April** it was decided "that the House at Gnosall be whitewashed under the superintendence of Mr Belcher and the steps to the Cellar turned."

1848

The Poor Law Commissioners wanted Newport Workhouse enlarged. They had asked about **accommodation for the sick at Gnosall**. In **January** the Guardians replied: "the two rooms referred to are capable if required of holding more beds without any inconvenience to the sick should such a necessity arise." In real emergency "there are other rooms in the Poorhouse which could be appropriated."

In **March**, the **Union was split again, this time into four districts:**

1. Newport (2497 pop./801 acres), Forton (362/7656), Adbaston (610/5330), High Offley (658/3520), Weston Jones (143/1227), Chatwell (90/500)
2. Gnosall (2321 pop./10,500 acres), Norbury (210 pop./4043 acres)
3. Chetwynd, Woodcote, Chetwynd Aston, Edgmond, Church Aston, Longford, Tibberton, Cherrington, Stockton (total pop. 3557/13188 acres)
4. Lilleshall (3851 pop./6136 acres)

In **June** the Guardians approved **vaccination contracts** for the Houses.

In 1846 a new Act had added the "**irremovable poor**" to the "settled poor" who belonged to the parish. This protected anyone who had lived in a parish for five years from being removed from it and the local Guardians had to support them if necessary – but they were charged on the whole Union rather than the parish they lived in. (I hope I've got this right.)

In **November 1848**, the Newport Guardians started drawing up lists of the "Irremovable Poor" and what each person cost (per half year), the total being transferred from the parish accounts to the "common charges". The most usual cost was £1 19s per person. Gnosall had at most two women on this list, usually just one (Mary Willcox, whose pay was stopped in 1850).

1849

In **April** some "cocoanut" was ordered "for picking to fill the beds with".

July had two items relating to Newport – the owners of Bellman's Yard were to be proceeded against because of a "nuisance" (it was a very hot dry summer), and

permission was sought from the Commissioners to for permission to issue a notice that “all poor persons within the Newport Salop Union who may be attacked with the Bowel complaint” should apply to the Medical Officer for remedies.

In **September** Mr Belcher was asked to organise **necessary repairs to Gnosall Warehouse Yard floor**.

1850

In **January** the Churchwardens and Overseers of Gnosall met the Guardians to ask for a **reevaluation of the parish** because of the changes made by the new railway line cutting through it.

The same month it was agreed that the **Children at Gnosall Poorhouse** should be taken out for exercise into the County two or three times a week.

End of the 1836-1850 Book of Minutes.

The next book of Minutes covers 1850-1852, PL11/5. By now the Minutes largely consist of accounts. Thomas Boulton and John Cotes were taking turns as Chairman and Vice Chairman.

There had been national concern about cholera and other epidemics. Vaccination of the poor had been going on within the Newport Union since at least 1836, and attempts had been made to remove piles of rubbish because of a belief that diseases were spread by foul air (miasma). In April 1850 the Union Medical Officers were paid extra for their efforts to achieve this under the Nuisances Removal and Disease Prevention Act of 1848.

On 2 July 1850 it was proposed to give the Medical Officers Lindop, Baddeley and Green 1/6 (rather than 1/-) for each successful vaccination case, “the Board hoping that the vaccinators will use their best endeavours in seeing that all poor persons be properly vaccinated in their respective districts.”

At the same meeting (and nothing to do with epidemics) the Master of Newport Workhouse reported that “James Talbott and Thomas Harris had acted obscenely in the Workhouse.” They were punished by solitary confinement on reduced rations for 48 hours.

The clerk Henry Heane was often “unavoidably absent” around this time (the 1851 census shows him in London) and his clerk Joseph Wright acted in his stead, with Heane’s signature added to the Minutes by means of a stamp.

In August it was proposed to **reduce the salaries of all Union Officers**, since the price of provisions had fallen.

In September the Matron of Newport Workhouse died, and Emma Wellings took her place in October 1850 on a salary of £20 plus “7lbs raw meat, 7lbs bread, 3/4 cheese, 1 Butter, 2 Qts Milk, 1/2 Peck of Potatoes.” [She was the niece of Samuel Binnell, the Workhouse Governor.]

In December 1850 John Cobb was do necessary repairs to the “Board Room Chimnies”.

1851

The Board had been discussing the Law of Settlement with Mr Doyle from the central Poor Law Board and felt that the “management and relief of the Poor” was falling unfairly on some ratepayers, others escaping entirely. They now turned their attention to the resented “**County and Police Rate** and its expenditure over which the Rate Payers have at present no control”.

On 14 January 1851 they moved that the present County and Police Rate system was “attended with great injustice in consequence of the control thereof being in the hands of irresponsible parties”. Control ought to be in the hands of the Ratepayers or their elected representative. “Any system of taxation without representation ought not to exist,” they said in an echo of the slogan of the American Revolution. Thomas Boulton and a committee were to organise this, and they sent a petition to the House of Commons in February, demanding County Financial Boards to handle the rates.

Mr Bowyer had reported on the **School at Gnosall Poorhouse**, in discussion with Mr Doyle from the Poor Law Board. In March Mr Jones and Mr Duncalfe were sent over to Shrewsbury to inspect the school there and report back to the Guardians.

A number of things were under consideration for Gnosall Poorhouse: the meeting of 6th May heard a report on the “**Industrial Training of the children**”, and on the alterations to be made by the Guardians in Gnosall Poor House “for the better classification of the Poor therein”. It was agreed to **take a piece of land at Gnosall** on terms agreed between Mr Boulton and Mr Belcher.

At the same meeting, it was agreed to pay £5 to the District 1 Medical Officer “for his great trouble and care” in attending William Shale for 8 weeks. This poor man had “a fracture of the Raminus of the Ischium on both sides of the Pelvis with the urethrum.”

At the next meeting on 20th May it was agreed to “continue the labors” at Gnosall Poor House especially the suggested **alterations to ventilation and sewage**. The Clerk was to report to the Poor Law Board on the appointment of a Schoolmaster.

In June the plans and specifications for the Poor House and a report on the terms under which the Workhouse and Poorhouse were held were approved and the

Committee was thanked for its efficiency. The plans were sent to the Poor Law Board for its approval, with the request that apart from the Schoolroom and Staircase, the rest was left to the Guardians' discretion, so as not to throw more burden on the Ratepayers.

In late July 1851 Mr Doyle brought the Poor Law Board's response to the **proposed alterations at Gnosall Poor House**. It was agreed that a Committee be appointed, including Thomas F F Boughey of Aqualate Hall, to look into moving all the inmates onto one site at Newport [**i.e. closing Gnosall Poorhouse**] and sending the children out of the Union for **industrial training**. The Clerk was to have this decision printed and distributed to the Guardians. This brought a furious response from **Thomas Boulton**, who hadn't known about it:

Great Chatwell,
11 Aug

My dear Sir,

I beg to inform you that I protest against the proceedings of the Committee appointed last board day. I understand that several meetings have been held of which I have not received notice. I wish this protest to be entered upon the Minutes of the Board today.

I am Dear Sir
Yours very truly
Thos Boulton

In October Thomas Boulton moved that "the printed paper purporting to be the Report of all the Committee appointed at a Meeting held on the 29th July last be not received, the same not being as stated thereon the Report of all the Members". He argued that "inasmuch as the Agricultural tenants are at present labouring under great depression from the very low prices of their produce" and "inasmuch as alterations in the Law of Settlement and Relief are contemplated", the Guardians should consider enlarging the Union Houses or sending the children out of the Union to save money. The Board's response to this is reported in obscure language but seems to mean that Mr Boulton withdrew his amendment against the report, but his other suggestion was agreed.

In any case, in November 1851 it was agreed to follow up Mr Bowyer's February report, "**hire the Land for the Industrial training of the Boys**" and John Sellman would take charge of superintending and training the boys at Gnosall. [A widow called Elizabeth Sellman had started teaching at the Poorhouse in 1841; it's likely this was her son John born 1821 who had been working as a gardener earlier that year.]

“It is ordered that John Sellman be appointed the Superintendent of the School at Gnosall subject to his obtaining his Certificate of Probation and that his salary be £30 a year to commence from the 6th day of May last.” Mr Cobb was to alter the Schoolroom at Gnosall under the direction of Thomas Boulton and Thomas Belcher. They were also to start paying rent for the land.

1852

This year saw the **Gnosall Poorhouse Master, John Hawkins**, in trouble on two counts, one serious.

In April John Hawkins asked for a fortnight’s leave of absence because of ill health. This was agreed and the Newport Relieving Officer Mr Rees took over his duties.

The Auditor had queried Hawkins’s claim of **Waste on the joints of meat** – only a quarter including bone was allowed. The Board supported Hawkins and wrote to the Poor Law Board saying a third of a joint could be classed as waste.

In May, since John Hawkins – who was also Registrar of Births and Deaths of the Gnosall District - was still unwell, and his Deputy Thomas Parton [a schoolmaster] was “incapable” (reason unspecified), the Board agreed that **George Augustus Baddeley** could take over as Deputy. He had just started up in Gnosall as a GP, and was the son of a Newport surgeon – who worked as Medical Officer for the Union.

The issue of “waste” rumbled on, and the Board asked the Poor Law Board for a ruling about waste. The Auditor had surcharged John Hawkins £1 0s 4d.

In August, **John Hawkins resigned as Registrar of Births and Deaths** for the Gnosall District, and George Augustus Baddeley took his place.

The Minutes for 14 September read as follows: **“The Visiting Committee having reported that they had investigated the charges made by two Paupers that they had been beaten and confined in the Dead House at Gnosall Poor House by the Master and Matron and that they had found that such was case it was ordered that the same be reported to the Poor Law Board.”**

This comes as a bit of a shock. John and Mary Hawkins had been in their posts since December 1838 when they replaced James Bettelley, and we have no way of knowing whether this sort of brutality had been going on all the time, or whether it was a one-off - and if so, what triggered it. Did Hawkins’s request for sick leave earlier in the year indicate some sort of nervous breakdown?

Nor do we know the age of the paupers who were beaten and locked in the Dead House; generally the Poorhouse took only children and the old and feeble.

In any case the **Hawkinses resigned** in December 1852 and the Clerk was told to advertise for a new Master and Matron.

In the meantime, business went on: the Clerk asked the Poor Law Board again for a ruling about waste, whether the Medical Officers could have a fixed annual sum "instead of fees for fractures etc", and also asked again for the Gnosall alterations plans back.

In October Thomas Belcher died and the Clerk wrote to ask for permission to elect a new Parish Guardian.

The men's bedrooms at Newport Workhouse were to be new quarried, and "sufficient matting for the Bedsteds for the Newport and Gnosall Workhouses be obtained."

On 7th December 1852, the Guardians proceeded with their plans for obtaining **land at Gnosall Poorhouse**. The Clerk was to tell the Poor Law Board they were going ahead with that and with their planned alterations. He was also to "write to Mr Hodson and ascertain if a part of **the Orchard adjoining to the Workhouse at Gnosall** can be had for the use of the Guardians." The Chairman was to ask James Wyley "to make a plan of which further Land required at Gnosall as he shall think necessary". (The Clerk starts referring to a Workhouse rather than a Poorhouse around now but it's the same building.)

On 21 December 1852 the Board appointed "**Cornelius Earl** the new Master of Gnosall Workhouse and and Relieving Officer of the Gnosall District and **Eliza Orton** that of the Matron of the Gnosall Work House subject to the approval of the Poor Law Board and to his being married previous to entering upon their duties". The couple married in early January 1853 at Oundle, Northants.

End of the 1850-1852 Book of Minutes.

The next book of Minutes covers 1853-1858, PL11/6. It has empty forms printed in it to facilitate the reporting of accounts.

January 1853

The Poor Law Board would not allow Cornelius Earl to be Relieving Officer as well as Master of the Poor House, so the Guardians proposed to take £10 p.a. off his salary. The Earls agreed to receive £50 p.a. plus rations. (In February the Poor Law Board wanted this apportioned between the couple, which was done £30-£20.)

The Guardians ordered "Chairs, Tables, Iron bedsteds and such other articles of furniture which the Chairman thinks necessary for furnishing Gnosall Poor House for the use of the Master and Matron be obtained."

The Poor Law Board had written in December about the **vaccination of children in the Union**, and the Clerk was to issue a notice. (It became compulsory to vaccinate young babies against smallpox later that year and a record was kept).

Mr Rees, Relieving Officer of District 1, was to take over District 2 at £30 extra, and **keep a horse to travel between Newport and Gnosall**. The Guardians told the Poor Law Board that this would be sufficient to cover the area because of “the diminution of Pauperism in the District”.

In June and July 1853 a domestic incident was reported – a man called Edwin Lloyd deserted his wife and two children, and the Clerk was told to publish an advertisement identifying him, but the runaway’s father turned up, took his son’s wife and children out of the workhouse and paid expenses. The ad was withdrawn.

16 August 1853 has a couple of interesting entries: “The Clerk to advertise for a **Female Servant for the Gnosall House** to superintendent [sic] the Washing, to Bake and make herself generally useful at a salary of £10 p.a. with board and lodging. Candidates to attend personally, with Testimonials before the next Board of 30th inst.”

At the same meeting: “The Clerk to take what steps he considers advisable towards **stopping as far as possible applications for relief to this Board by the Irish.**” The effects of the Potato Famine of 1845 were still being felt. It’s unknown what steps he took, if any.

In the same month, the Board decided that John Hawkins’ remaining salary be not paid until all his claims for expenses had been settled.

In September the squabble with the Poor Law Board continued. They were being difficult about Mr Rees; the Guardians wanted to get on with the Gnosall alterations. A Committee was formed to carry out the **Nuisances and Diseases Prevention Act of 1848**, and the Clerk was to issue advertisements throughout the Union warning the inhabitants against accumulating “any refuse or filth near their Dwelling”. The belief in miasma continued.

On 11 October 1853 it was ordered that “John Miles’s wife who died of Typhus Fever ... be buried at the expense of the Parish of Gnosall”.

In November the new Master at Gnosall Poor House complained that “Mr Bullock the contractor for flour etc refuses to deliver the same to Gnosall on account of his not being contracted to do so”. The Board ordered Mr Levett to transport the flour from Newport to Gnosall Poor House at their expense.

1854

In January the Rev. John Till of Gnosall approached the board for help with a young Gnosall woman in “an unsound state of mind” who should be “placed under proper restraint”. The Board ordered her to be taken immediately to Stafford Lunatic Asylum, and her father, a wheelwright, agreed to pay for her keep there (4/- a week).

In late January, Thomas Parton of Gnosall Heath [the schoolmaster] was appointed Assistant Overseer of Gnosall Parish, Joseph Parton standing £20 surety on his behalf.

In March Mrs Earl asked for a fortnight’s leave of absence for ill health.

Mr Holland on behalf of the Governors was to meet James Wyley from Gnosall Parish “to agree upon what sum shall be the purchase money for the Gnosall Poor House.”

In May the Clerk was told to write to the Chairman of Wolverhampton Board of Governors about “the removal of Richard Payne and his son William to the Parish of Gnosall while suffering the one from Itch [could be scabies or VD] and the other from Small Pox.”

A startling Extraordinary Meeting in May had a “long discussion” about the pros and cons of **buying the Victoria Hotel in Newport to convert it into a Workhouse**. Sir Thomas Boughy at length proposed that this would “not be proper” and the idea was defeated.

The messy situation around the alterations to Gnosall Workhouse continued. In June the Guardians told Mr Doyle that if they were going to spend any money, it would be on a new central Workhouse in Newport.

The same month the Guardians heard that “the Gnosall Poorhouse Master Mr Earl has hired and **engaged a servant without consultation or permission.**” The Clerk was to write and tell him to come and explain himself. And then we come to the second reported case of brutality at Gnosall Poorhouse:

“4 July 1854 - It having been reported to the Board that the Master and Matron of the Gnosall Poorhouse had been repeatedly guilty of punishing the Children contrary to the rules and upon investigation of the Medical Officer and also on the admission of the Master that such had been so and that in one case that of a child named Brayne his head had been cut open with a stick whereby the Medical Officer was obliged to attend him -

Ordered that Proceedings be taken against them for an assault and that the case be referred forthwith to the Poor Law Board.”

The Earls had been in their posts for 18 months. It's worrying that the Board apparently didn't find out about their treatment of the children until they felt themselves insulted by Mr Earl engaging a servant without permission. We can assume that Mrs and Mr Sellman, who had been teaching the children, took over - they were appointed to be Master and Matron the following month.

On 1st August 1854 it was resolved to build "a new Workhouse for Paupers in or near Newport." The children would be sent to another Union, perhaps Wellington. Sir Thomas Boughey, John Stokes and Thomas Wedge took on the job of finding a site for the new Workhouse and having it planned and built.

Mr Rees, the Relieving Officer for Newport and Gnosall, was to "go at once to Gnosall and immediately dislodge the servant from the Poor House." The Guardians' irritation about this unwanted servant leaps off the page! The Earls had their salaries paid up to 15 August - £7 17s 1d.

In September the Clerk reported that Mr Doyle said that Wellington couldn't take the children, but that Stafford could. They offered to take forty children at around 3/- per head per month.

In October there was trouble finding anyone within the Union who would make shoes for the paupers. It was decided to buy them wherever they could be got.

Mr Boulton moved that Mr Rees's pay be increased to 100 guineas (quite a contrast to the lowlier officers).

In November, in the teeth of opposition from Mr Boulton, the plans for the new Workhouse were sent to the Poor Law Board for approval.

November 1854 also produced an entertaining exchange with the Poor Law Board. The Clerk read a letter from the Poor Law Board signed "Courtenay Secretary", "requiring information on the gratuities to be paid the several officers for their labours concerning the sanitary measures of the Union." This was from **Lord Courtenay, the 11th Earl of Devon**, later known as "the good earl".

The Guardians were deeply insulted (perhaps not realising they were dealing with the aristocracy) and sent back a wonderfully stiff retort: "Resolved: to reply regretting that the Poor Law Board should have felt it necessary to write a letter which the Board cannot help but feel betrays a want of courtesy quite uncalled for."

They went to say that the officers had worked hard to remove nuisances at the request of the Board of Health. The Board did not look upon their remuneration in the light of a "gratuity" - it was a moderate payment for a great deal of labour.

In December the Sellmans were given a month's notice in their duties of

Schoolmaster and Schoolmistress at Gnosall. The Poorhouse was now being quickly run down.

1855

In January 1855, notice was given to the **Churchwardens and Overseers of Gnosall to give up the Poor House** at the end of the Guardians' time therein, and Rev. Mr Till, the Poor House Chaplain, was told that his services would not be further required.

The Workhouse Committee was to decide what to do with the furniture.

The Sellmans were given £12 and a Certificate praising their conduct.

The potatoes and goods were fetched away from Gnosall Poorhouse at the end of January.

Mr Rees was to arrange for someone to look after the empty house – Mrs Sellman offered and was accepted. This could have been John Sellman's wife Mirah, but she had two small children and it's likelier to have been Elizabeth Sellman, the ex-teacher.

Mrs Earl had written to the Poor Law Board wanting a testimonial. The Guardians refused to give her one.

In April £94-1-8 was sent to Stafford Union for the children's clothing, and in September the Rev. Till, Mr Wilde and Mr Parton formed a committee to look into the possibility of apprenticing some of the Union children at Stafford.

1856

Work went on draining the land for the new Workhouse at Newport (Audley Avenue) and building it. (A photo of this workhouse in about 1912 can be seen at <http://www.discovershropshire.org.uk/html/search/verb/GetRecord/theme:20080409193144>)

In February the Rev. John Till proposed that the National School at Moreton be adopted for the education of the poor children of the parish in receipt of out relief, and this was agreed.

In March the Newport Matron was given a backdated increase to £30 p.a. because of the influx of paupers from Gnosall Poorhouse.

In May the fixtures at Gnosall Poorhouse were still being sold off.

In June the Rev. Till's proposal that "the **Gnosall Church School** at Gnosall in the County of Stafford be approved by the Guardians of the Union as a School for the education of Pauper children of poor persons" was agreed.

In November the Gnosall Overseers were told to "open a separate Banking account with the Parish and that one Overseer sign a cheque for the contribution calls as they become payable and transfer the same from the Parish account to the Union account."

John Stokes was told to order "such Elbow and other Chairs as may be necessary in the Workhouse".

Sarah Plant "a refractory Pauper" was to be confined for 24 hours on an altered diet.

1857

The Guardians put the old Newport Workhouse up for auction, but no one bid for it.

The pauper children from Lilleshall Parish were to be sent to Lilleshall School and Dorrington Wood School.

Efforts were made to make the Workhouse in Newport more comfortable for its new elderly inmates. In May "some small tables for the old people to eat off and some forms with backs on in the old people's room" were ordered. Women over 60 were to have a different diet from the younger paupers: "1 Pint of Tea, 5 oz of Bread and 1/2 oz of Butter for each Supper and Breakfast".

1858

Early this year an agreement was reached with the **S.E. Shropshire School at Quatt** south of Bridgnorth to take the Union's children. They were carried there from Stafford Union on 20th March.

An 1851 Gazetteer praised "the benefits derived by the children, who are here removed from scenes of inferiority and degradation and brought up in habits of industry, and a knowledge of gardening combined with the inculcation of honest principles and religious knowledge, are blessings of incalculable amount.

The house is capable of accommodating 170 children, and the boys are employed in the cultivation of the land, in the management of cows, pigs, and a pony; the girls are employed in the house and dairy work."

The adult poor of Gnosall who couldn't support themselves would now be sent to the new Workhouse on Audley Avenue in Newport, and their children to Quatt in Shropshire.

Some information about some of the officers

The clerk **Henry Heane** was born in Gloucester. His wife Emma died in 1846 and he went to London for a while, putting his children into boarding school in Gloucester. He was back working for the Guardians from 1857 to 1865, placing descriptions of miscreants in the Poor Law Unions Gazette, as well as working as a solicitor in Newport. He died in April 1867 aged 57.

The **Rev. Fearon Jenkinson**, who was from Cumberland, died aged 72 in 1845. He was Perpetual Curate of Gnosall Parish from 1817 till 1845. He lived at a house now demolished sited on the grounds of Parkside.

Thomas Boulton, born at Newport about 1794, was a farmer at Great Chatwell. In 1820 he married wealthy industrialist T J Collier's niece, Susan. In 1861, by which time he was a Magistrate, he gave his address as Great Chatwell Hall. He died in 1883, having been a JP and Chairman of the Board of Governors.

Thomas Bentley was also a farmer, at Knightley Eaves/The Hays, just north of Woodseaves. If this is the farmer shown on the 1851 and 1861 censuses at Cash or Cash Villa, with a brother and two sisters, he was born in Gnosall about 1801. In 1838 he was renting a field to John Hawkins, possibly the Workhouse Governor to be.

The **Rev. John Till**, from Stafford, was Perpetual Curate of Gnosall with Knightley from 1845 until his death aged 91 in 1901. He was responsible for the building of the splendid vicarage "in the Elizabethan style" by the church (Parkside) in 1850.

Elizabeth Sellman was born Elizabeth Meeson in Gnosall in 1781. She married John Sellman in 1819, but he had died by 1841. In 1847 she was engaged as Schoolmistress at Gnosall Poorhouse, where she went on working until its closure in 1855. In the late 1850s she moved with her son John, daughter-in-law Mirah, and their five children to Wednesfield, where John eventually became a newsagent. She died in 1863 and was brought back to Gnosall for burial.

Felicity Potter