

Book Reviews

Banbury Workhouse Records, 1835-1843, A5, card cover, indexed, 72pp., 2011, £4.50; *Banbury Constables, 1775-1925; 150 years on the Beat*, A5, card cover, illus., indexed, 48pp, 2005, £3.50; each transcribed and compiled by Carol Richmond, + £1 p&p, from Oxfordshire Black Sheep Publications, 14 Meadow View, Witney, Oxon OX28 3TY

These modestly presented and priced but substantial booklets provide a wealth of information. The first is on the 'under-class' of Banbury Poor Law Union in its earliest years. The 'new' Poor Law of 1832 transferred responsibility for the poor from individual parishes to a union with a central workhouse. The Banbury Union covered north Oxfordshire from Bloxham and Adderbury, and parts of Northamptonshire (Middleton Cheney north to Boddington) and Warwickshire (to Avon Dassett and Farnborough).

Mainly based on the Guardians' Minute Books in Oxfordshire Record Office, the selection is almost entirely of items relating to the unfortunate inmates (including employees), generally omitting detail of regular administration. Nevertheless the minute of 21st January 1836 records: "William Frost of Neithrop attended ... and offered to make 200,000 bricks upon the land purchased for the new Workhouse upon being paid £1.6s. per thousand. To have the clay already dug on the premises... the brick to be common sized 10" long by 5" wide by 3" deep..."

Routine entries were of inmates being allowed out to Divine Service but not attending; the birth of bastards and attempts to discover the father; the movement of inmates to other Unions, and *vice versa*; disputes between the cook and the porter; inmates being taken before Magistrates for various misdemeanours.

Although the workhouse was built to take in paupers, in these years at least, there remained frequent out-relief: usually in kind, "Edward Tredwell, of Hornton: 3lbs mutton. Four children ill"; "John Welch, Adderbury East. Nurse 1s. Coal 6½d, gin 9½d" (was the gin for the nurse?); and so on.

There are regular references to lunatics being placed in or removed from Mr Tilsley's asylum at Hook Norton. This was Henry Tilsley who ran the long-established asylum there from 1826 to 1842, described in William Parry-Jones' *The Trade in Lunacy* (reviewed in *C&CH* 5.5, Spring 1973).

Inmates included children who required education, of a sort. The priority is shown in that the porter was paid more than the schoolmaster. "6th June 1839. Reuben Gardner, James Mold and Thomas Jarvis ran away... and returned this morning... several others had ...run away. Ordered [they] be solitarily confined for 12 hours..." A week later Reuben Gardner was off again and brought back by a Police Officer... "put to oakum picking in a secure place for a week."