

## **SNIPPETS FROM THE ARCHIVES: 4**

**Deborah Hayter**

**From the Croughton Vestry Book 1830-31 [N'hants R.O. 93p/232]**

1830 November 5<sup>th</sup>. *At a vestry held this day it was ordered that:-*

*The labourers be employed in the proportion of one man to every 50s. of rate paid. The prices of labour to be as under:*

*Man & wife 5s. per week; Ditto + child 7s.; Ditto + 2 children 8s. and 1s. per week to be paid by the Overseer for every child above 2 under 10 years of age.*

Nov 29<sup>th</sup>. *The vestry agreed the wages of an able labourer from this time to be 9s. per week.*

1831 February 20<sup>th</sup>.. *at a vestry held this day it was ordered that the sum of £100 be borrowed for the purpose of sending some Paupers to America to be paid off in four years from next Lady Day – and that Mr. Bennett to be requested to write to the landlords Mr. Lockhart & Mr. Ramsay on the subject.*

1831 June 19<sup>th</sup>. *At a vestry it was ordered that the Head Money be discontinued from this time and the wages of an able labourer be 11s. per week.*

Croughton's 'Vestry Book' begins in 1830, recording the meeting of the vestry every month. The 'vestry' here was not a room, but the meeting of the ratepayers, out of whom were chosen every year the churchwardens, the overseers of the poor and the parish constable. At the end of the eighteenth century and in the early years of the nineteenth, the 'Old Poor Law' of 1601, which had laid the responsibility for poor relief on individual (ecclesiastical) parishes, was in crisis. All over the country parishes such as Croughton were struggling to cope with and support the large number of unemployed labourers who applied to 'the parish' for relief, with little prospect of anything more than casual and occasional work. The ratepayers had a choice: either they paid for the labourers' support through their poor rate, which was both collected and distributed in the parish, or they paid that money directly to the labourers by employing them. In the first entry above, the vestry recorded that the labourers were to be distributed among the ratepayers according to the level of rates each paid. At other times 'Headmoney' was paid: the Overseers made up the low wages paid to the fathers of families with so much per 'head' in the family. There being no possibility of an increase in future employment in sight, many vestries, like Croughton's, sought to 'get rid of their surplus populations' by paying for them to emigrate to America or the colonies. This was a kind of investment in reverse: they borrowed to pay all the expenses for young men and sometimes young families to emigrate, saving themselves a considerable future outlay in parish rates.