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## THE PARISH ADMINISTRATION OF SHOREHAM, 1782-1894

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SHOREHAM parish, 5,506 acres, extends some four miles from east to west over the chalk hills of the North Downs and two miles north to south along the Darent valley. The landscape painter, Samuel Palmer, who rented Water House in the village from 1827 to 1835 found in the parish, his 'valley of vision'.<sup>1</sup> For eight years, his 'Young Self' created from the countryside around him, impressionistic landscapes of perpetual midsummer and eternal harvest. After he left the village, for his remaining forty years of life, he dwindled into the conventional Victorian painter. His inspiration was the externals of country life, how far these reflected the reality requires examination in some detail.

During the period 1782 to 1894, Shoreham could not altogether escape the economic fluctuations which were experienced by Kent as a whole. However, the varied nature of its agriculture coupled with the village paper-making industry helped to cushion its inhabitants against the extremes of economic change. Population statistics for the nineteenth century for the parish prove very little; the population did not decline, neither did it increase greatly. At the first census in 1801, the parish contained 828 persons; in 1901, the figure was 1,515.<sup>2</sup> For the first half of the period, the valley was as isolated as it had been throughout all its history; 'Having no high road of any public description, [it] is but little frequented by travellers, and the turnpike road being wholly chalk and stones is by no means pleasant for travelling', commented W. H. Ireland in 1830.<sup>3</sup> The opening up of the valley with the construction of the London, Chatham and Dover line to Bat and Ball, Sevenoaks, did not take place until the early 1860s.<sup>4</sup>

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the larger farms in the parish varied in size between one hundred and seventy-one acres (Timberden), and four hundred and fifty acres (Sepham).<sup>5</sup> The chief valley farms, still farmed at the present time, were, from north to south, Castle Farm, Preston, Filston and Sepham. Their acreages all, as might be expected, decreased as a result of the recession towards the end of the

<sup>1</sup> K.T.P., *Paintings and Drawings by Samuel Palmer in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford* (undated), and *Shoreham Parish Collection*, extract from article cataloguing the Title Deeds of Water House, 1728 to 1900.

<sup>2</sup> *Victoria County History, Kent*, iii, London, 1932, 368.

<sup>3</sup> W. H. Ireland, *History of the County of Kent*, iv, London, 1830, 540.

<sup>4</sup> C. F. Dendy-Marshall, *History of the Southern Railway*, ii, London, 1963, 338.

<sup>5</sup> K.A.O. (1963), *Tithe Map and Award, 1843*, C.T.R., 335.

century. Castle Farm fell in acreage from 350 acres in 1843 to 321 acres in 1875; Preston from 300 acres to 248; Filston rose from 378 acres in 1843 to 430 in 1851, only to predictably fall to 305 acres in 1875; finally Sepham, 450 in 1843 spectacularly fell to 230 by 1875.<sup>6</sup> No evidence survives to show whether leases were long or short, but it is possible to trace a farming dynasty occupying Filston Farm for a century. In 1785, Samuel Love was leasing the farm; he was succeeded by his two daughters who retained possession until the early 1870s. Meanwhile, his son, another Samuel, leased Castle Farm during the 1840s.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to these substantial holdings, William Round, a prominent vestryman (living in the fifteenth-century yeoman's house which survives as the finest building in the modern High Street), rented his home and nine fields on the opposite side of the street for £31 10s. in 1823.<sup>8</sup>

In 1843, the parish contained 2,600 acres of arable land, 1,199 acres of woodland, 820 acres of pasture or meadow, 150 acres of market gardens, orchards and fruit plantations and 30 acres of hop ground. The arable land produced 3,050 bushels of oats in 1843; 2,120 bushels of barley and 1,195 bushels of wheat.<sup>9</sup> The valley farms were essentially arable farms in 1843; only a very small acreage was devoted to fruit and hops. They averaged about 100 acres of pasture and meadowland apiece. By 1894 fruit growing in the parish was extended on the high, wooded ground in the north-west of the parish. A sale catalogue deposited with the archives of the Mildmay family states: 'Owing to the large returns . . . during recent years, a large acreage of woodland . . . has been grubbed and planted with fruit with satisfactory results; this is being continued at the present time by tenants at their own expense.'<sup>10</sup>

Shoreham paper-mill, adapted, from one of the six Domesday water-mills in Otford Manor, to produce white paper by a British paper-maker Alexander Russell by 1690, offered an alternative form of employment to farming for the village proletariat. The Wilmott family, mill-owners in the late eighteenth century and throughout the nine-

<sup>6</sup> Mildmay Papers, *Rate Book, To benefit the Union Workhouse at Sevenoaks, 1875*. I am indebted to Hon. Mrs. Mildmay-White for permission to study the private papers of the Mildmay family in so far as they relate to the history of Shoreham between the years 1823 and 1900.

<sup>7</sup> Public Record Office, *Census Report for the Lathe of Sutton at Home, Hundred of Godsheath, Parish of Shoreham, 1841* (complete), H.O. 107, 485/6.

<sup>8</sup> Mildmay Papers, *op. cit.*, *Marriage Settlement between Humphrey St. John Mildmay, Esq., and Ann Eugenia Bingham Baring, 1823*. (The bride became the first wife of H. St. J. Mildmay, M.P., was a daughter of the Alexander Baring, of Baring Bros., who was created first Baron Ashburton in 1835.)

<sup>9</sup> K.A.O., *op. cit.*, *Tithe Award, 1843*.

<sup>10</sup> Mildmay Papers, *Sale Catalogue, 1894*.

teenth century, could offer employment to 58 workers in 1851, and to 70 at the end of the century.<sup>11</sup> These numbers included the few skilled papermakers and a high proportion of unskilled women and girls.

An examination of parish administration from the 1780s to the end of the last century is hampered by the paucity of surviving records. The churchwardens' and overseers' accounts are missing, as are the workhouse visitors' report books; there are no workhouse committee minutes, no accounts from the surveyors of the highways. With the exception of the parish registers, beginning in 1558, only the Vestry Book (1782-1884), and the Churchwardens' Books (1826-1883) remain in the Parish Chest.<sup>12</sup> Among the private papers of the Mildmay family is deposited a Rate Book, dated 29th October for the collection of a single rate to benefit the Union Workhouse at Sevenoaks.

But, in compensation, the Vestry Book contains a very full record of the subjects with which it was concerned. There is only one gap in its chronology, between the years 1822 and 1828. A 'Mem. April 7th. 1828' notes that 'The book having been mislaid from November 1822 to the present date, the acts of vestry for the intervening period may be found in the overseer's vestry order books.' The latter no longer exist. Vestry meetings were held between twice and ten times a year. Generally, there were between five and seven meetings, only in 1828 did ten meetings occur. But in five other years there were nine meetings; in 1787, 1815, 1817, 1819 and 1838. The number of parishioners who attended averaged a dozen; there was one occasion when only three members attended and the meeting was adjourned. This latter meeting was in May 1838, and had been called to consider the best means of appropriating the monies due from the sale of the workhouse.

The incumbent was mentioned very little in the earlier entries. In February 1847, the entry giving the text of the 'Notice of meeting to consent to the sale of the workhouse' was signed first by 'Mr. Falcon, . . . minister', followed by the churchwardens and overseers. He was, however, the curate; the incumbent being the Rev. Edward Repton, M.A. Mr. Falcon was also the chairman of the meeting, held a few days later on 20th February, 1847, to resolve on the sale of the former workhouse premises. In the years 1819, 1820 and 1821, the vestry book records one churchwarden appointed by the vicar and one by the parishioners.

Thomas Borrett, of New Place, was prominent among the vestrymen in the 1780s. He served as churchwarden in 1782, signing the minute agreeing to the hiring of a house for the use of 'the poor of this parish'. On 21st April, 1783, he was named as one of the two chosen

<sup>11</sup> Public Record Office, *Census Report for the lathe of Sutton at Hone, hundred of Godsheath, parish of Shoreham, the night of March 30th, 1851*. H.O. 107, 1613.

<sup>12</sup> Parish papers, *Shoreham Vestry Minute Book, 1782 to 1873*.

overseers for the year ensuing, but his name and that of his fellow overseer as well as the names of the two churchwardens were crossed out and four other names substituted headed with the words 'Agreed to by us'. This seems to indicate a disputed election.

The Borrett family had acquired Preston, the largest village estate and earlier held by the senior branch of the Polhills, in 1712. Between that date and his death in 1739, John Borrett, from Kirkby Lonsdale, Westmorland, Protonotary of the Court of Common Pleas, had acquired further property in the parish in the valley and had moved his family to a newly built 'Elegant palladian villa', named New Place on the south of the village. Thomas Borrett was John Borrett's great nephew and had married his cousin Martha, John Borrett's grand-daughter.<sup>13</sup> He was only to enjoy the estate for another thirteen years; on 13th February, 1796, an indenture for the sale of the estate was drawn up, the result of the pressing demands of no less than thirty-two creditors.<sup>14</sup> He was followed at New Place by Sir Walter Stirling, who, in 1823, was replaced by the first member of the Mildmay family, Humphrey St. John Mildmay, which was to remain in Shoreham in the rebuilt and renamed Shoreham Place until 1950.<sup>15</sup>

The other prominent vestrymen in the 1780s were chiefly farmers, especially those farmers renting the larger farms, such as William Austin of Preston; the latter building having now declined into a farmhouse, as it remains today. But the small farmer, William Round was also represented, as was the paper-mill owner, Thomas Wilmott, who frequently appeared.

In 1841, a salaried 'parish clerk' (vestry clerk?), was appointed. He was not again referred to until two years later. A minute of 17th April, 1843, noted 'It was deemed advisable to make a minute of the agreement entered into between the parishioners and Thomas Medhurst at a vestry held in the year 1841 upon his appointment as parish clerk, viz. that he should receive the salary of £12 a year for keeping clean the church, attending to the fires, cleaning the stove and pipe, washing the surplices and tolling the bell for all vestries, services.' In 1847, it appeared that Thomas Medhurst was failing to perform his duties adequately. On 20th February, 'It was requested that the churchwardens do admonish the clerk and order that in future the church be kept cleaner than it has been from some time back and that he is to attend to the matter agreed to by the minister and by the vestry in 1843.'

<sup>13</sup> E. Hasted, *History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent*, folio edition, Canterbury, 1778, i, 317.

<sup>14</sup> K.A.O., *Bargain and Sale, 1796*, U. 36, T. 446.

<sup>15</sup> Mildmay Papers, *op. cit.*, *Marriage settlement, 1823*.

It seems that by 1828, if not earlier, the parish had decided to adopt the Sturgess-Bourne Act and constitute their representatives into a select vestry. An entry of 15th May of that year recorded that 'At a vestry holden . . . after regular notice having been given, it was unanimously resolved to conduct the business of the parish of Shoreham by the continuance of a select vestry, and the following persons were nominated as members thereof.' Eighteen names follow. The wording appears somewhat vague, but it would seem to indicate that the select vestry was to commence at that date, continuing from then, rather than it had come into being some years previously, and was merely being confirmed. If it is accepted that May 1828 marks the commencement of the select vestry, the following year, the vestry met ten times during the year, a record number of times. This may merely have been coincidental, for the following year the number of meetings were the fairly usual seven. But the needs of the poor had not necessitated so many meetings: a poor rate (of three shillings in April and three shillings in October), was levied at only two of the ten meetings in that year. Perhaps the newer form of organization led temporarily to greater zeal.

The general policy of the vestry throughout, so far as it can be judged from the vestry book, would seem to show responsible supervision over parochial affairs, the regular appointment of officers and a full recording of the minutes, especially in the case of agreements dealing with workhouse premises, the appointment of the parish doctor and the later paid officials. As was to be expected in a rural parish at this date, the subject of poor relief in all its aspects took precedence in the minutes over other parochial business. Local extra-parochial charity was small scale by comparison; the fifteenth-century almshouses were maintained, the eighteenth-century charity school was failing—Thomas Borrett had ceased to pay the schoolmaster's salary, and there were a number of small doles to the poor. The main burden of relief fell upon the parish.

Perhaps, it was significant that the vestry book commenced in December 1782, the same year as Gilbert's Act was entered on the Statute Book; a measure recognized as introducing a new spirit of humanitarianism into the care of the poor.<sup>16</sup> The Shoreham vestry conscientiously provided housing, medical attention and general care of the poor within the parish limits. Settlement has only one mention; a reference to the complicated dispute with Chelsfield parish concerning 'The boy that had his leg broke', the legal aspects of which are considered in *Kentish Sources, IV The Poor* (1964), 140-2.<sup>17</sup> In April

<sup>16</sup> 22 Geo. III, c. 83, 1781-2.

<sup>17</sup> E. Melling, *Kentish Sources, IV, The Poor*, Maidstone, 1964, 123.

1791, the parish agreed to reimburse the boy's employer for the expenses he had incurred.

Shoreham's vestry book begins with the hiring of a house for the poor and with the order by the overseer "That from henceforth no person shall be allowed any provision out[side] of the said house exceeding the sum of one shilling per week or on some extraordinary occasion as of infectious disorder or such like."<sup>18</sup> Less than a week later, a second meeting drew up the rules for the administration of the workhouse under the master, Charles Broomfield, from whom the building was hired. Broomfield was himself a tenant of Mr. Wilmott, the paper-mill owner,

"That the said parish do allow Charles Broomfield two shillings and sixpence per head per week for six months in the year and two shillings and threepence per head for the other six months in the year.

That the said parish of Shoreham to pay to the said Charles Broomfield ten guineas per year for the use of the different houses he now rents under Mr. Wilmott.

That the said Parish of Shoreham shall provide clothing and bedding for all the poor they send to the care of the said Charles Broomfield.

That the said Charles Broomfield shall allow and find the poor under his care good and sufficient meat, drink, washing and mending in lodging and — [illegible] and that the said poor shall be allowed two pence out of every shilling they shall earn by their labour, and the parish two pence more out of every such shilling earned and the said Charles Broomfield shall have the full residue of the money earned by the poor under his care.

That there shall be a book kept by the said Charles Broomfield specifying the proper accounts of all such money arned [*sic*].

That as by order of the vestry made no person shall be allowed more than one shilling a week out of the said workhouse as weekly pay.

That the rent of the said house shall commence from Christmas last.

That if at any time any of the poor have occasion for wine by order of the doctor, it is to be paid by the parish.

That the overseers of the said parish of Shoreham for the time being do once in the week inspect the said workhouse to see they have all things necessary.

That the said Charles Broomfield shall be paid once in every month such money as is due to him from the said parish.<sup>7</sup>

The rules were signed by the two churchwardens, the two overseers and seven members of the vestry.<sup>19</sup>

In April 1797, it seems that a smaller house was rented for the poor. The mill-owner, Thomas Wilmott, who owned the former work-

<sup>18</sup> Parish papers, *op. cit.*, *Vestry Minute Book*, 29th December, 1782.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 4th January, 1783.

house, rented this house and premises from the owner who lived in Cudham parish. The vestry, in its turn, rented this property for six guineas for the term of six years: 'The vestry agrees to keep and leave the said premises in good and sufficient tenantable repair at the expiration of the said term, also that John Hall nor his wife are to be put in the said premises.'

In September 1802, the parish decided to 'Purchase a house and land of Mr. William Jordan for the sum of one hundred pounds to convert into a workhouse.' Perhaps the choice of a larger building and the decision to purchase reflected the general increase of poverty in the area at the turn of the century. The following month, the vestry gave a description of the property and noted an increase in the price: 'Three tenements and premises . . . at the sum of one hundred and ten pounds, Mr. Jourdan agreeing to apply one moiety of the expences of the conveyance and the parish the other.' The position of this workhouse, since replaced by later buildings, appears on the *Plan of the Intended Turnpike Road*, surveyed in 1809.<sup>20</sup> It stood on the north side of the junction of Shoreham Street with the road leading to the bridge, opposite to the almshouses and the cage, on the south side of the road. At this date, it was described as 'Four tenements and gardens' and, as four cottages, it was offered for sale in 1835. Five years earlier, in April 1830, the specifications of a somewhat costly iron fence appear in the vestry book: four feet in height, the cost was to be twenty-four pounds with thirty shillings allowed for paint, 'Two coats the first year and three times within the first ten years.'

The first Guardians of the Poor under the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act were appointed in Shoreham in April 1835. In January, 1836, it was resolved to offer for sale by auction at a meeting of those 'Ratepayers and owners of property entitled to vote', 'Three freehold tenements under one roof, two tenements (Leasehold) under one roof held for an unexpired term of sixty-six years at a ground rent of one pound per annum'. No one voted against the resolution. A minute requested that application be made to the Poor Law Commissioners to enquire as to the quota they required towards the new Union Workhouse at Sevenoaks. Any monies, remaining in the treasurer's hands after the quota had been paid, together with any profit from the sale of the workhouse were to be invested in government securities by the justices for the benefit of the parish. But there was little parochial interest in the latter subject; only three persons were present at the next vestry meeting called to consider this very subject and the meeting was adjourned. The sale of the workhouse property took place in September 1838, and in February 1847. A brief entry at the earlier date records

<sup>20</sup> K.A.O., *Quarter Sessions Records*, Q.R.U. m. 19.



that £96 3s. 8d. had been realized for a portion of the property and noting that the balance due to the Exchequer and Loan Commissioners for enlarging and improving the union workhouse at Sevenoaks was £1,645 16s. 0d. There is no record in the vestry book of the sale of the larger portion of the property, or whether the parish was able to pay the balance due to the Loan Commissioners.

Some measure of out relief in the form of the provision of clothes, a money dole and materials to spin or weave was provided by the parish in the later eighteenth century; this relief is recorded at length in the vestry book. For example, in November 1785, Elizabeth Powsey was to have 'A pair of shoes and some linsey woolsoy [*sic*] and the widow C. a shift, a pair of hoses, some flannel for an under petticoat and Sarah Johnson, a pair of shoes, a shift and a petticoat'.<sup>21</sup> Money doles were recorded in December 1786: 'The widow Powsey shall be allowed 5/- per week for the maintaining her three children and at the same time, it was agreed to allow John Piper 5/- per week during his illness'.

During the winter of 1787, the vestry had resolved that 'The poor in general that are found pulling hedges or stealing wood out of the woods or stealing turnips or hop powls [*sic*] shall be prosecuted . . . at the expense of the parish'. But at the same meeting (January 1787), it was agreed that the parish officers should provide sufficient wood for the poor's relief, 'As the vestry shall think proper'.<sup>22</sup> In the same year occurred the only entries concerned with the provision of raw materials to the poor. 'Mr. Waring shall be paid for the yarn he has provided for the poor and that he shall provide what yarn shall be wanting in future until further orders are given and that Mr. Waring shall provide worsted for the same purpose of knitting of stockings to those persons he shall think fit.' In June, it was requested that Mr. Waring be desired to stop the knitting and spinning till the first day next month.

Shoreham vestry provided medical attention both for the poor in the workhouse and for the paupers outside it. It entered into several contracts carefully noted in the vestry book from 1783 onwards. The contract was usually for one year, with payment in a lump sum. Occasionally, the cost of treatment was a cause of dispute between parishes as instanced in the dispute concerning Richard Lane between Shoreham and Chelsfield. The first agreement for a parish doctor in the surviving vestry book was in March 1783: 'Thomas Waring. To attend the poor of this parish as apothecary and surgeon on the following conditions for one year from the above date at £4-3-9½. To supply when needful with attendance and medisans [*sic*] all the poor belonging to the parish of Shoreham . . . whether they receive alms or

<sup>21</sup> Parish papers, *op. cit.*, *Vestry Minute Book*, 22nd November, 1785.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 4th January, 1787.

not, . . . including all sickness and lameness, natural smallpox and all exidents [*sic*] of all kinds, that is to say, that nothing but midwifery and cases thereon for one month is to be excepted. All paupers that fall sick or lame or meet with any accident within the said parish of Shoreham to be in this agreement.<sup>23</sup>

The next agreement, in March 1788, was with a different surgeon, Mr. Clarke, and gives clear evidence of the parish assuming responsibility for former parishioners now living in an adjoining parish and also agreeing to extra payment for fractures and, as was usual, for midwifery cases. But in the following year, Mr. Richards of Seal was appointed, 'Man midwife' as well as surgeon and apothecary. By April 1815, the parish agreed to pay more than five times as much as they had offered in 1783 to George Edwardes of Farningham—£23 to include 'Smallpox and venereal complaints' and 'If sent for in cases of midwifery, to charge one guinea each including all medical attendance'. Perhaps this payment is in line with the equally high salaries being paid to parish officials in Shoreham in the first half of the nineteenth century. In April 1829, £40 was paid to the assistant overseer for his year's service to recompense him for attending the magistrates' courts in Sevenoaks, only four and a half miles distant and for other journeys on behalf of the poor within five miles of his home.<sup>24</sup> The single surveyor of the highways appointed in 1836 was given a salary of £12 a year. This was the first time a single surveyor was appointed. The practice and payment was continued each March until 1850, one individual holding the position for several years. The collector of the poor's quota was paid £5 a year in 1836. Three years later his salary was increased to £10 a year. The constable was not mentioned in the vestry book until 1845, by which time he had become a salaried official at £10 a year. Two years earlier, a salaried parish clerk was appointed at £12 a year. Certainly these salaries must have been a drain on parochial resources. Perhaps the minute of 25th May, 1837, indicates this: 'Agreed to make a voluntary rate to cover the outstanding liabilities of the parish at the rate of four pence the pound'.

The actual cost to the parish of parochial poor relief cannot be evaluated since no rate books have survived. The only evidence remains in the estimations the vestry made of what it considered would be the cost of relief at any given time. These represent the hoped-for levy; what was actually collected remains unknown. The total number of assessments agreed upon from 1783 to 1850 was 123, compared with 28 for the church and 12 for the highways.

Between 1783 and 1800, the assessment was generally made twice

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 9th March, 1783.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 15th April, 1829.

in the year, averaging three shillings in the pound, with the exception of 1795 with four assessments totalling five shillings. Between 1800 and 1806, three assessments a year were general, with an average assessment of six shillings. There was a slight improvement in the years between 1807 and 1810, but from 1810 to 1832, the assessment averaged six shillings. In 1833 and 1834, eight shilling assessments made three times in the year indicated that these years, with 1801 (8s. 6d.), were the worst for the parish poor. In 1838, when the first part of the workhouse property was sold, the assessment fell to two shillings and ninepence; in 1839 and 1840 to two shillings; in 1841 to one shilling, while from 1842 to 1850 no assessments were made. These large reductions indicate the effect of the new Union workhouse at Sevenoaks upon parish finances.

The only rate book extant among Shoreham records is among the private papers of the Mildmay estate.<sup>26</sup> It is of considerably later date than the events which have been discussed above, having been made on 29th October, 1875, 'Under the authority of the Union Assessment Committee Act of 1862 in force in this parish', for the benefit of the Union workhouse at Sevenoaks. It is interesting to note that one of the churchwardens concerned in its preparation was George Wilmott; his forebear, Thomas Wilmott, features prominently as has been noted in the vestry book a century earlier. In 1875, the rateable value of Shoreham parish was assessed as £13,848 2s. 6d., with a gross estimated rental of £16,643 12s. 9d. (The rate was to be one shilling in the pound; on this valuation it was to yield £692 8s. 1½d.: £660 1s. 2d. was actually collected.)

This valuation was more than double the figure for 1831, the earliest year for which a figure was given. The 1831 figure was £5,171.<sup>26</sup> By the end of the century, a threefold increase on 1831 can be discerned: in 1899, it was estimated to be £16,512.<sup>27</sup> Revaluations ordered by the vestry, during the years covered by the vestry book (1782-1850), were duly noted in the book in November 1803, and in July 1835. There is no indication of the rateable value of the parish before or after either revaluation, although after the 1803 revaluation a vestry meeting was called on 27th March, 1804, 'For the purpose of giving those persons relief who think themselves aggrieved by the late ad valorem of this parish. It is now by us agreed . . . we nominate and appoint Mr. Thos. Fuller and Mr. Jas. Martyr to meet the original surveyor in order to hear the several complaints and then to survey the respective

<sup>26</sup> Mildmay Papers, *op. cit.*, in note 6, *Rate Book*, 1875.

<sup>26</sup> S. Bagshaw, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of the County of Kent*, Sheffield, 1847, i, 662.

<sup>27</sup> *Kelly's Directory of Kent*, London, 1899.

premises and their determination thereon to be final in every respect.'<sup>28</sup> The earlier decision to have the parish revalued (November 1803), was thus recorded: 'On the present circumstance of things, it was thought advisable and finally fix'd on, to have the whole of the parish valued as soon as it conveniently can be done.' 'The present circumstance of things' would seem to be a reference to the purchase of three tenements to convert into a workhouse in the previous year, 1802.

The 1835 revaluation must have been the first of several between then and the end of the century, bearing in mind the three-fold increase in value. The vestry book stated it was 'For the purpose of equalising the rates of the parish as many alterations and improvements have taken place in the parish since the valuation made by Messrs. Thompson and Selby' (in 1803). No further rates were to be imposed until after the revaluation; the proposed surveyor was to come from more than fifteen miles away from the parish. Two gentlemen were applied to, from Reigate and Gillingham, five guineas a day each and expenses were required by them. Five months later a vestry minute recorded that payment for the revaluation was to be advanced on the parish account. At the end of the January following (January 1836), the vestry had to defer making a new rate for the poor because the book containing the new valuation was not in the hands of the overseer.

By June 1838, the vestry were again considering revaluation, at least partially: James Green of Sevenoaks was to 'Value the improvements'. These latter were specifically referred to as 'Viz. the new Dower in the paddock and the New Inn on the London road on Sepham farm'. The paddock, still known by this name, is to the south of the former Shoreham Place, the re-built New Court of earlier years; it is first mentioned in the marriage settlement of Humphrey St. John Mildmay, drawn up in September 1823.<sup>29</sup> The New Inn became known as the Polhill Arms some years later when the South-Eastern Railway Company named their newly-constructed tunnel the Polhill tunnel, after the family which still owned the hill under which it passed.

As to the rates themselves, generally the vestry levied them with a specific purpose in mind. It has already been noted that the poor rate outnumbered all those levied for other purposes and recorded in the vestry book. Other recurring rates were for the repair of the highways, the renewal of the church fabric and, in the early nineteenth century, to contribute towards the new county gaol and the county lunatic asylum then under construction at Maidstone. There were few references to what seems to be a general rate. One such, in October 1786, the vestry confirmed a rate of one shilling and sixpence and

<sup>28</sup> Parish papers, *op. cit.*, *Vestry Minute Book*, 27th March, 1804.

<sup>29</sup> Mildmay Papers, *op. cit.*, in note 8, *marriage settlement*, 1823.

stated that 'All bills shall be paid and other demands likewise within forty days after the assignment of the rate'. The pressure of the upkeep of the workhouse, only sold in 1847 although the vestry had taken the decision to sell it in 1836, together with the relatively high salaries to parish officials obviously placed a heavy burden on the parish. In May 1837, the vestry agreed 'To make a voluntary rate to cover the outstanding liabilities of the parish at the rate of four pence the pound'. Earlier in January of the same year, the vestry had decided that the owners of houses and apartments rather than the occupiers should pay rates. Apart from the poor rate, the highway rate varied between sixpence and two shillings and fourpence halfpenny; the latter figure in August 1814; sixpence was the more usual figure. The church rate varied between fourpence and ninepence, usually levied once in the year. For Maidstone gaol, twopence or threepence was levied twice in the year between 1814 and 1822 and for the asylum ranging from one penny to threepence between 1829 and 1836. In 1831, the rates for the asylum were noted as being 'A special county rate'.

The only source of information regarding parish officers is again the vestry book and therefore several questions as to their tenure and duties must remain unanswered. For instance, it cannot be discovered whether the rota of overseers was based on the tenure of certain properties. The churchwardens and overseers were both appointed at the same vestry on Easter Monday; the incumbent choosing one churchwarden, the second being generally chosen by the vestry, occasionally by the titular, but not actual, lord of the manor, Humphrey St. John Mildmay, as in March 1845. No women were appointed as overseers, although several women held positions of importance in parish life during the nineteenth century. In April 1829, the vestry was asked to consider 'The propriety of appointing an assistant overseer'. This was the year following the mention of a select vestry, and the fortunate nominee was paid £40 for his tenure of office. Two of the ten parishioners nominated were chosen as surveyors of the highways, until 1836, when a single surveyor was chosen at a salary of £12 a year, a payment which continued until 1850. The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act resulted in the nomination of unpaid guardians of the poor in April 1835, and of a collector of the poor's quota in 1836 with an allowance of £5 a year increased to £10 in 1839. The constable was not mentioned until 1845 when twenty persons were nominated 'As liable to serve the office of constable'. Thomas Brooker was chosen, with the salary of £10 a year. A salaried parish clerk was appointed two years earlier being paid £12 a year for his services. The 'Beatel' mentioned in April 1816, had been unpaid.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Parish papers, *op. cit.*, *Vestry Minute Book*, April 1816.

## THE PARISH ADMINISTRATION OF SHOREHAM, 1782-1894

No conclusions will be attempted for this survey of parish administration. Shoreham must differ little from the vast majority of Kentish rural parishes during the period examined, except in that it was marginally more prosperous than many. Perhaps its uniqueness lay only in its undoubted beauty, preserved for posterity in Samuel Palmer's landscapes.

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