

Apologies for the complexity and detail of this booklet. My excuse is that I wrote it during the first corona virus lock-down, and so had rather more time on my hands than I would have had otherwise. For anyone considering whether to actually read it, I would say that its interest, if any, lies not so much in historical facts or statistics as in the snapshots, or brief glimpses, of people who were alive in Ayton two centuries ago.

My topic is how this parish looked after its poor and sick under the Old Poor Law, that is, before the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which changed things, bringing in a more unified, but harsher national system. I have chosen to concentrate on the period from 1821 to 1834 for two reasons: firstly, because there is more evidence from this time than either before or since, and, secondly, because it was then that the Ayton poor house, now converted into a restaurant under the skilful management of Cherie and Mike Larkin, was operating.

THE SELECT VESTRY

The chief evidence about the treatment of the village poor comes from the minutes of the Great Ayton Select Vestry which started work almost exactly two hundred years ago. Here is a transcript of its first three meetings to show how it worked (1):

The First Meeting of the Select Vestry was held in the School House in Great Ayton on Thursday the fifth day of July 1821 pursuant to public notice given in the parish church the Friday preceeding.

<i>Present</i>	<i>William Brown (2)</i>	<i>Joshua Bowron</i>	<i>Overseers</i>
	<i>William Martin</i>	<i>John Maston</i>	
	<i>Joseph Donaldson</i>		
	<i>James Donaldson</i>		
	<i>Joseph Jackson</i>		
	<i>John Richardson, chairman (3)</i>		

Application has been made for assistance for Eliz Clark wife of Wm Clark, she being now very old and her husband off on a voyage at sea. It is resolved that the overseers are to get her medical advice and whatever more is needful. But some doubt appearing as to where the said Wm Clark's legal settlement is, as soon as he comes home he is to be taken to the magistrates to prove his settlement (4).

The overseers are to enquire what Jane Raper and her two children can be boarded in Stokesley Poor House for per week, and report it the next meeting (5).

Ann Gibson weekly cess to be discontinued
John Elliott, Swainby, ditto
Ann Shaw, widow, not to have any cess at present.
Mary Lamb's girl to be got off to place (8).
Betholina Young to have needful bed clothes, bed & bedstead by the overseers.(9)

John Alderson's application for assistance. Ordered to be given him one pound as relief.
Wm Webster ditto To have nothing, but to go about when he has no work
(for 'going about' see page 18).

James Rawling having become blind, it is agreed he is to be placed with Mary Codling, and she is to be paid for cleaning and taking care of him., and the overseers are to find a fresh place for Mary Nicholson (6).

Resolved that John Peacock is to be taken and to be brought before the magistrates to have Jane Raper and Ann Wrightson's children feliated [affiliated] on him as soon as can be conveniently done (5).

The next meeting to be held this day two weeks.

John Richardson

The Second Meeting of the Select Vestry was held in the School House in Great Ayton on Thursday the 19th day of July 1821.

<i>Present</i>	<i>Wm Brown</i>		
	<i>James Donaldson</i>		
	<i>Joseph Jackson</i>		
	<i>John Richardson</i>	<i>Chairman</i>	
	<i>Revd. William Deason</i>	<i>Clerk</i>	
		<i>Joshua Bowron</i>	<i>Overseers</i>
		<i>John Maston</i>	

Report is made that Jane Raper and her children can be boarded in Stokesley Poor House for 5/- per week, but she being willing to do with 3/6 a week, it is resolved to give her 3/6 a week and remain where she is (5)

The overseers report that Betholina Young is now ill, and have given her 1/6 relief, and remain where she is.(9)

James Rawling is to have suitable clothing and a pair of new sheets, and Mary Codling is to have 6/-for cleaning him and 9d per week for waiting on him and washing for him (6).

Eliz. Elwood made application for shoes for two of her children, but it was agreed they are to have none at present.

Application has been made for relief for Daniel Maston of York (4), he being very ill and his case urgent. The overseers have sent him two pounds and they are to have his situation under their care 'till the next meeting.

It is resolved that John Appleton is to have 2/6 a week taken off his cess. The overseers of the roads are to be desired to find him work.

The next meeting to be held in the school room this day two weeks at seven o'clock in the evening.

John Richardson

The Third Meeting of the Select Vestry held in the School House in Great Ayton on Thursday the 2nd day of August 1821.

<i>Present</i>	<i>Revd. William Deason</i>	<i>James Donaldson</i>	
	<i>Phillip Hesleton Chairman (3)</i>	<i>William Martin</i>	
	<i>Joseph Jackson</i>	<i>Joseph Donaldson</i>	
	<i>William Brown</i>	<i>Joshua Bowron</i>	<i>Overseers</i>
		<i>John Maston</i>	

Betholina Young's care to be taken under the care of the overseers.(9)

James Cook applied for relief. He is ordered to be set to work to break stones for the high roads (10).

Ann Gibson's son being gone to place, the overseers are requested to get him a pair of shoes & a waistcoat.

William Shaw has proposed to take Anderson Shaw an apprentice to be a tailor. The overseers are to treat with him and report to next meeting (11).

Mary Wilson to have two blue aprons; Ursula Suggett one shift, and the overseers to examine her clothing (7).

William Robson's daughter to have a place, the overseers to get her a pair of strong shoes.

Hannah Jordinson to have two Guineas for her rent (12).

To meet in the School room this day two weeks, 7 o'clock evening.

NOTES

1. Select Vestries started up in response to an act of Parliament of 1819 that allowed parishes to set up these committees to administer poor relief, although not many villages chose to have one. The Ayton SV met regularly every fortnight between 1831 ad 1836, and its minutes provide a lot of detail about how the system worked.

2. The members of the village's SV were mostly farmers. For instance, Joseph Jackson was the tenant of Aireyholme, the largest farm in Ayton, and the Donaldson brothers were from East Angrove, the second largest. However, William Martin was the owner of the tannery behind the High Green, and the Rev. Deason was the vicar of Ayton.

3. The chairmen of the SV tended to be among the most prominent members of the village. John Richardson of Langbaugh was a Quaker and the owner of a tanyard. Philip Hesleton, another wealthy Quaker, owned a mill in which linseed oil was manufactured, and it was he that later sold, from his estate, the land on which the Friends School was built. And Thomas Graham, later chairman for several years, owned Ayton Hall, and also Ayton House on Easby Lane.

4. 'Settlements' are discussed on page 24. Daniel Maston from York must have had a settlement.

5. Jane Raper features prominently in the SV minutes (see page 13). Here, she agrees to take a cut in her cess (allowance) rather than be sent to the Stokesley workhouse. Then we learn that her two children were both illegitimate, and that their alleged father, John Peacock, is in trouble for not contributing to their maintenance. (for the problem of 'illegitimate' children, see page 19)

6. Mary Codling was herself a pauper who was often employed by the SV to look after elderly or very sick paupers.

7. It is sometimes difficult to know whether particular paupers were being kept in the poor house or not (see page 16). These two probably were, as we know that Ursula Suggett died in the poor house not long afterwards.

8. i.e. made to find employment, most likely as a domestic servant.

9. Perhaps it was first proposed to put Betholina Young in the poor house, but when she became ill she was left where she was.

10. James Cook appears regularly in the SV minutes (see page 19). He had a wife, Mary, and five children, and was often unwell. He was offered various employments but never seemed to hold onto any for long (see page 19).

11. William Shaw, tailor, proposes to take on his grandson, Anderson, as a parish apprentice, meaning that costs, including appropriate clothing for the apprentice, would be partly met by the parish. The Shaws were a prominent village family, many of whom were tailors. (see page 20)

12. Hannah Jordinson must have been renting part, or all, of a private house, and the parish were helping her with the annual rent. (see page 16)

THE OVERSEERS OF THE POOR

At meetings of the Select Vestry most cases discussed were either telling the overseers of the poor what to do before the next meeting, or checking on what they had already done. The two overseers were the lynch pin of the entire system of parish poor relief, which had been going on for centuries, long before Select Vestries were brought in to supervise their work. In fact the office of overseer of the poor dates from Tudor times (although the Ayton records only go back to 1794). Their work was demanding and varied. They had to assess the condition of the sick and poor in the village and give them relief when necessary, and they also had to make annual lists of how much poor-rate villagers were expected to pay, and collect it from them. Occasionally, too, they had to leap on a horse and travel to distant places where people were living who depended on Ayton for their poor relief:

11/10/1824

Margaret Taylorson, Maltby, informs us she has lost her cow. Isaac White [one of the overseers] is to assist her at Yarm Fair in the purchase of another, and to act according to his judgment.

Yet these overseers were unpaid, apart from expenses. They were appointed in succession from a list of those who owned land or houses, and when their turn came they had no option but to serve at least a year.

One advantage of this parish-based system was that the overseers in a community like Ayton, which had at this time a population of about a thousand, including (old) Nunthorpe and Little Ayton, had probably grown up in the village and possessed detailed local knowledge. They were not like bureaucrats trying to apply a rigorous system of rules devised in London for the whole nation.

To do the job properly overseers required a sympathetic approach to their clients, but also to be firm when they thought it necessary. Take, for example, the case of a twenty-four year old girl, the daughter of a leather worker, who suddenly became homeless:

17/2/1825

Jane Suddick having left her place (she being with child), and her father Jacob refusing to take her into his house, the overseers are requested to provide her with lodgings and to take legal means to obtain the expense thereof of her father if refused payment where demanded.

3/3/1825

Jacob Suddick has agreed to take his daughter home.

17/3/1825

Jane Suddick applies for relief for her child. The overseers are directed to attend to it.

They also had to have a considerable degree of literacy and numeracy. There were letters to receive and answer from overseers in other villages, lawyers and magistrates to deal with, and, above all, they needed to compose accurate and clear accounts so as to record moneys got and spent. Obviously, not all overseers possessed all these qualities. Having examined poor law records in Guisborough and nearby parishes, one commentator wrote that overseers were ‘very ignorant in general’, and their accounts sometimes ‘little better than hieroglyphics’. But the Ayton records are on the whole clear and easy to read, and the spelling good, though not always perfect. For instance, the following entry refers to a person, not a sick vicar:

24/2/1784

Man and horse going to Stoxley with a sick parson . . . £0-1-0

Another possibility was corruption. If an overseer happened also to be a dealer or shop-keeper then there were money-making opportunities. In Hutton Rudby in 1834 an overseer who was also a general dealer paid out all relief at his shop, refusing it to claimants who were not also his customers. And in Stokesley the same year it was reported that the office of overseer was hotly contested by two shopkeepers ‘from a conviction of its very lucrative nature’.

Occasionally, the overseers were met with refusal to pay the poor rate when requested (see page 26). Verbal abuse was also possible. It must have been when visiting Jasper Charlton to receive his contribution to the poor rate that the following happened:

6/7/1826

In consequence of the complaints made to the Vestry by the overseers and constables against Jasper Charlton & his wife for their keeping a disorderly house, and abusing them in the exercise of their duty, it is agreed that they prefer a bill of indictment against them at the Quarter Sessions.

Charlton, who lived on Guisborough road near the river, seems to have been an awkward customer. According to the 1823 trade directory he had an unusual profession – nail-maker. He was often in trouble.

9/3/1827

Jasper Charlton continuing to keep a disorderly house by entertaining tramps contrary to the frequent request of the township, it is agreed the overseers use every endeavour to put an end to the same by legal means.

Joshua Bowron and John Maston were the Ayton overseers when the Select Vestry started. Bowron was the partner of Henry Richardson, and together they operated Grange mill. John Maston, who had been an overseer since 1794, is important in the history of Ayton's poor law. He made up the overseers' accounts, and also liaised with the magistrates and did many of the required trips to other villages and towns. He was also master of the Postgate school for which he received a salary of £5/16/- a year, but for his work as an overseer, only his expenses.

John Maston's successor in both roles was Humphrey Sanderson, who was even more important for our history than Maston. Sanderson's dual role as both schoolmaster and overseer, was legalised by the same act of 1819 that had allowed Select Vestries to be set up. It was now permitted for parishes to appoint salaried assistant overseers in a bid to improve the efficiency of the volunteer system, and Sanderson was the first of these, at a salary of £4/4/-. However, within a few years his work was clearly appreciated since he was given a rise:

15/8/1825

On considering the amount of Humphrey Sanderson's salary of four Guineas being too small for doing the business he is frequently engaged in for the Town, it is proposed for the consideration of the general meeting that it be advanced five pounds a year, and he to make out all accounts for the Town but not to collect any rates.

So this was to be his new salary:

31/3/1826

It is agreed that Humphrey Sanderson continue Master of the Charity School with a salary of £5/16/- a year and the house for teaching eight poor children – and nine pounds four shillings a year for assisting the overseers and other officers of the township in making out their assessments & accounts – but not to collect any rates.

Humphrey and his wife Mary lived rent free in the garrett above the school room, and you can still see him there if you visit the Captain Cook School Museum (remembering, of course, that in Captain Cook's day this was a different building, though on the same site). He and his wife continued to live above the schoolroom, and he went on teaching the children of the poor, and writing accounts, until his death in 1848 at the age of 73. During this time (or earlier) Mary had eight children, though only three of them seem to have survived to adulthood.

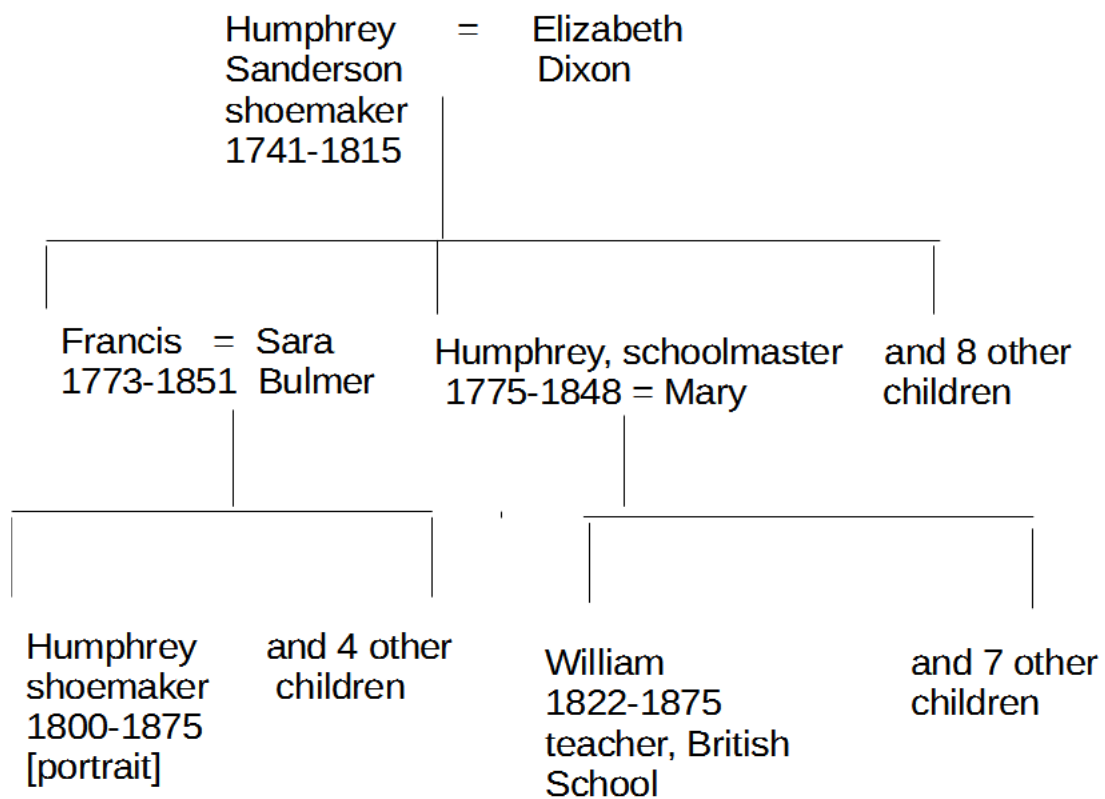
19/6/1848

Humphrey Sanderson died after 25 years diligent, faithful and correct service to the parish. Stephen Hunter [later, first master of the Marwood School] is appointed in his place.

As a postscript to these facts about Humphrey Sanderson I might add that I was hoping to reproduce here a copy of a contemporary oil painting of him. The portrait belongs to Mrs Dot Bailey (née Cossey), but unfortunately it turns out that it shows, not Humphrey Sanderson the schoolmaster, but his father, a village shoemaker! The Sandersons were a prominent Ayton family

over several generations, and intermarried with Fawcetts and Bulmers. Many of them served as churchwardens and in other parish offices:

This is part of the family tree of Humphrey Sanderson, schoolmaster and assistant overseer of the poor:



THE POOR HOUSE

The very first poor house in North Yorkshire was started at Brompton, near Northallerton, in 1648. Much later, in 1722, an act of Parliament (Knatchbull's Act) gave official permission for any parish, or group of parishes, to build, buy or rent a poor house for those paupers who needed housing. This led to many market towns or larger villages to build their own poor houses. Whitby, for instance, built one in 1726, Scarborough, two years later, and Stokesley, in 1755. Then came Gilbert's Act in 1782, which again encouraged communities to build poor houses so as to avoid having to support paupers by paying their rent. This led to another wave of poor house building. An old document quoted in Ord's *History of Cleveland* says. 'Poor-houses were growing more and more common every day. On which Ayton resolved immediately to build one, and follow the rest'. This was in 1785, and the document goes on to explain that £250 was raised, partly from the poor rate and partly from charitable contributions by '11 men of landed property'.

From this sum was built a poor house consisting of three, semi-detached, two-storey cottages. The cottage to the west (where the museum is now) had a large room where the inmates of the poor house could meet and have their meals – though they were also allowed to cook in their own rooms.

24/5/1827

Thos Dickinson and the old men in the poor house to be allowed coals sufficient for cooking their victuals during the summer season.

Above was the schoolroom, where John Maston and later Humphrey Sanderson taught a few poor children for free, plus others whose parents paid. And above the school room was a garrett for the master and his family.

During the period of the Select Vestry (1821-34) the Ayton poor house was mainly intended for the old or infirm – often widows – who were too vulnerable to receive outdoor relief in their own homes. Beds were also kept available for those who might arrive in the village destitute and in need of immediate accomodation. For example:

1/5/1823

Mary Bainbridge has come to the Parish with child, and wanting a house she is to be put into the room with Ann Shaw.

And again, a married couple:

30/1/1828

John Waller & wife having returned from Bradford and being in need of a house and some furniture, it is agreed they have a room in the poor house, and the overseers are to get them a bed and bedstead.

But this expedient was only temporary:

28/2/1828

On considering John Waller's situation it is agreed that the overseers are to inform him to provide himself with a house at Mayday next.

Many poor houses were built at this time which should really be called work houses, especially in larger communities, such as Whitby, Scarborough and Northallerton. Stokesley's one was similar. These often operated under a contract system, whereby the governor of the house could try and make a profit by selling whatever the paupers in the house produced through their labour, in return for feeding and looking after them. It was never a very popular system with anyone, because profits were often small or non-existent, and also because people thought it encouraged the governor to exploit his inmates and treat them harshly.

Ayton never tried the full contract system, but it does seem likely that when our poor house was first built it was seen as a potential workhouse. Robert Kettlewell, vicar of Ayton, in his book, *Cleveland Village* (1938), quotes a document – since disappeared – which implies this. The document says that the poor house had a common working room, where all industry was to be 'to the sole benefit and profit' of the doer. There was also a 'Table of Industry' where meals were provided at a cost of one shilling per person for the week. In other words, at least some of the inmates were supposed to be making enough money from selling their work to be able to pay for their meals.

However, it is likely that this workhouse project did not last very long – if it ever got going at all. As Paul Hastings explains, in many other villages 'work schemes involving small poor houses 'were doomed to failure and lack of profitability', and this was probably the case with Ayton. In the Select Vestry minutes there is little mention of poor house inmates selling their work, or of a 'Table of Industry'. But there is one occasion when the Select Vestry discussed the possibility of moving back to a workhouse, but dismissed it:

10/5/1827

Notice having been given for considering the propriety of converting this house into a workhouse, and no person having any plan to propose for carrying the same into effect, and the original promoters of the scheme having forsaken the design, it is agreed that the proposed plan is ineligible and would not be to the advantage of the township to adopt.

Stored furniture and clothing

The poor house, with its small cottage rooms and garrets must have been a crowded place to live, what with the furniture new inmates brought with them, and also the furniture and clothing stored away when former inmates no longer had any use for them:

2/2/1830

Mary Maston being deceased and in consequence of her having been a pauper several years and expensive to the township, the overseers are directed to retain her furniture.

The case of William Clark shows the quantity of things that were stored in the poor house:

19/2/1824

William Clark from Edinburgh, with his wife, has made application for assistance. It is agreed that the overseers take a house for them and let them have the furniture from the poor house as is to spare and they are in need of. She is to have a pair of shoes and be relieved with what is needful till next meeting.

4/3/1824

The overseers report that they have taken a house of William Wright for William Clark and his wife at £2.2.0d rent, and has supplied with such things as are needful for them. It is agreed that they are to have £1 lent them and to have 2s 6d per week cess. The following is an inventory of what they have been furnished with:

<i>Two old blankets</i>	<i>Feather bed and three pillows</i>
<i>A washing tub</i>	<i>Bedstead and green hangings</i>
<i>Candlestick</i>	<i>Old frying pan</i>
<i>Tin boiler</i>	<i>Brass pan</i>
<i>Tinder box</i>	<i>One chairman</i>
<i>Tea kettle</i>	<i>A small table</i>
<i>Two spoons</i>	<i>Two pair of sheets</i>
<i>A lot of earthenware</i>	<i>A pair of blankets</i>
<i>Poker, tongs, and fire shovel</i>	

Then there was surplus clothing. The death of Ursula Suggett is further evidence of the storage space necessary:

17/2/1825

Ursula Suggett having been ill several weeks, it is agreed that Marcia Lamb have 1/- per week for waiting on her.

17/3/1825

Marcia Lamb has produced sundry bedding and clothes belonging to the late Ursula Suggett, as under viz.

<i>Three blankets</i>	<i>Two rugs</i>	<i>One bed and one pillow</i>
<i>23 caps</i>	<i>One pair silk gloves</i>	<i>Four shifts</i>
<i>One pair sheets</i>	<i>One pillowcase</i>	<i>Four aprons</i>
<i>5 cotton handkerchiefs</i>	<i>5 pockets</i>	<i>One shawl</i>
<i>One silk handkerchief</i>	<i>One bed gown</i>	<i>Two flannel petticoats</i>
<i>One woollen petticoat</i>	<i>One flannel waistcoat</i>	<i>One pair of flannel drawers</i>
<i>One new cotton gown</i>	<i>Two pair of stockings</i>	<i>Two pair of leather gloves</i>

All of which articles are lodged in a box in the garret until otherwise disposed of. It is agreed for Mercia Lamb to have 7s 6d for her trouble and finding soap, and for washing, cleaning, and attending [Ursula Suggett, before she died].

The case of Elizabeth Ditchburn illustrates how furniture and domestic items, presumably all stored in the poor house, could accumulate.

25/11/1822

Jas. Ditchburns wife from Whitby, having left there and come to live at Stokesley with her son and two daughters, leaving her husband at Whitby, has applied for relief for her son, 13 years old, and it is agreed for him to have a pair of clogs and 1/- relief, and to go about for his meat among the farmers until some other plan can be adopted respecting him. The two daughters have got employment in the spinning mill there.

11/12/1823

John Ditchburns wife from Whitby, who with her two daughters and one son have lived sometime in Stokesley, and the owner of the house they lived in having distrained their furniture for rent 12/-, the overseers have paid the same, and taken the furniture as per inventory:

<i>2 feather beds and bedding</i>	<i>2 iron pans</i>
<i>1 chest of drawers</i>	<i>warming pan</i>
<i>a bedstead</i>	<i>frying pan</i>
<i>4 chairs</i>	<i>oak chest filled with sundries</i>
<i>table</i>	<i>tin boiler</i>

The daughters and son have returned to Whitby, and she is to have occasional relief for now.

22/5/1828

Elizabeth Ditchburn applies again for relief. It is agreed to give her 4/- and she agrees to come into the poor house here. Her husband by a letter from Whitby appears to have been very ill, but at present rather recovering. They have not lived together for several years.

And there were also documents to be kept safely.

17/4/1823

It is agreed that a good oak chest is to be bought to keep the papers and books in that belong to the Parish.

Cleaning the houses

Many entries are about trying to improve the cleanliness of the poor house. Occasionally, threats were used.

20/2 1823

The overseers are directed to get the poor house well cleaned, and to inform Thos Dickinson if he does not keep himself cleaner than he has done he is to go to Stokesley poor house.

There is no evidence that this threat was carried out, so perhaps he did improve, but the cleanliness problem continued:

21/8/1823

The beds and bedding in the poor house being generally in bad condition, the overseers are particularly directed to get the whole well repaired and the house well cleaned.

The following year the members of the Select Vestry agreed to carry out their own inspection before each meeting:

8/1/1824

It is agreed that the persons who attend each Vestry inspect the state of the poor house before any other business be proceeded in.

(Might this duty have been a factor in reducing attendance at future meetings?)
August 16th 1827, only Joseph Jackson attended [the Select Vestry meeting].

The building itself

In 1819 the disbursements of the overseers have a mysterious list of expenses for building work on the poor house. Among the various items are

<i>Thos Codling 19½ days at 2/6 at P. house</i>	£3	13	9
<i>Wm Watson for glazing p.h. windows</i>		12	6
<i>Jas Easby for leading stones to ditto</i>		13	6
<i>Wm Martin – 560 bricks</i>		16	10

The 500 bricks, plus other items for straw for thatching, lime and wood, suggest a major project. Could it be that only at this date were the attics over the three cottages actually built? Apart from this list there are only a few references to the actual poor house building:

11/11/1824

The overseers are to attend to the situation of the poor houses and to get them thatched when they want [this may refer to the poor houses down town]

20/1/1833

Thomas Watson applies for a room in the poor house for himself and his family. It is agreed for him to have the large room on the right hand side of the passage.

8/4/1841

To the schoolroom is added the chamber adjoining it, and last occupied by Bridget Fordy, in order to enlarge the said school room.

The inmates

From the evidence available it is not possible to work out who the residents of the poor-house were from year to year. During the period dealt with here, a list of names is provided only twice. Firstly, from the Select Vestry minutes, a list that may, or may not, be comprehensive:

7/3/1832

The situation of the paupers in the poor-house having been inspected with respect of clothing and being found in a bad state, the overseers are directed to get them as under: Thos. Scott, 1 blanket; Dawnay Shaw, 2 blankets and 2 sheets; Sarah Newton, 1 blanket; Jane Raper, 1 blanket; Mary Iveson, 1 shift; Geo Boys, 1 blanket; Ralph Carter, 1 pair of stockings; William Sturdy, 1 sheet.

This second list has nine inmates. It comes from the 1841 census, and is useful because it shows who was living in each 'apartment', and it also gives their ages:

<i>Front Street</i>	<i>Mary Newton</i>	<i>60</i>
	<hr/>	
	<i>Dawnay Shaw</i>	<i>65 (1)</i>
	<i>Jane Raper</i>	<i>55 (2)</i>

<i>William Dobson</i>	75
<i>Ralph Carter</i>	65
<i>Thomas Scott</i>	51 (3)
<i>Sarah Newton</i>	53 (4)
<i>George Boyes</i>	60 (5)
<i>Jane Boyes</i>	60
<i>Humphrey Sanderson</i>	60
<i>Mary Sanderson</i>	60
<i>William Sanderson</i>	20

and the schoolmaster

NOTES

(1) Dawnay Shaw had been a widow and receiving relief since at least 1818. When younger she had been paid for looking after other paupers:

29/11/1821

Dawnay Shaw is to have 9d a week for washing & waiting on Mary Wilson.

Later on she requested the parish to provide a loom for her son:

15/4/1824

Dawnay Shaw makes application for a loom for her son Ralph, he being going apprentice to be a weaver to John Sturdy. It is agreed he have one but to continue to be the property of the town until he can redeem it, and not to be removed from his master's shop without leave of the overseers for the time being.

(2) Jane Raper, in 1821, had resisted an attempt to send her and her two boys, John and Joseph, to the Stokesley workhouse. However, six years later she agreed to send them there, she herself being allowed to remain in the Ayton poor house.

11/10/1827

It is agreed for the 2 boys of Jane Raper to be removed to the poor house at Stokesley, and the overseers are requested to apply to T & J Mease [owners of a linen-weaving mill] for employment for the eldest.

It was discovered that the father of Jane Raper's boys was not John Peacock but George Bewick, who finally agrees to contribute to their maintenance:

18/12/1828

The overseers report that Geo Bewick was committed to the House of Correction in consequence of his refusing to give any satisfaction to the township respecting Jane Raper's son James - but a letter has been received from him offering to compound for the sum due. On considering the same it is agreed that the overseers endeavour to obtain security for the payment of £20 in compensation for the amount.

Some years later there occurred what must have been a somewhat embarrassing incident for all concerned. Thomas Graham, of Ayton House, who was then the chairman of the Select Vestry, promised to take Jane Roper's son Joseph as an apprentice (presumably to learn farming). However, master and servant did not get on:

1/7/34

The overseers report that indentures of apprenticeship were executed by the magistrates to send Jane Raper's boy to Tho Graham, and that he has refused to take the boy and execute the indentures in consequence of some objections he had to him It is agreed by Tho Graham (at the next justice meeting) to discuss whether his objections are sufficient to clear him of the boy.

25/9/34

Robert Raper having run away, his mother says it is the fourth time. He is ordered to go back to Mr Graham and to do the best he can. In case of fresh abuse he is to apply to the overseers.

We know from a deed that Jane Raper was still alive in 1857.

(3) Thomas Scott, in 1841, was the youngest inmate of the poor house. He had joined it in 1828. He might have been a weaver as it seems he was expected to make his own clothing.

17/1/1828

It is agreed that Thos Scott come into the Oldmens room in the poor house, and to have 1/- a week and to find his own clothes.

23/11/1826

Thos Scott is to have yarn for a pair of stockings and Cloth for a shirt.

(4) Sarah Newton had been in the poor house since at least 1818. At one point she was accused of theft:

3/2/1825

Thomas Dickinson charges Sarah Newton with taking from him half a stone of meal. It is agreed that the overseers replace it to him and stop the value out of Sarah Newton's cess. Sarah Newton is also charged with taking from Ursula Suggett a pillow case and a bag. The matter is to be enquired into.

No more is heard of these charges, and that year her allowance was increased:

22/12/1825

It is agreed for Sarah Newton's cess to be advanced to 1/6 per week, and to have two shifts.

24/5/1827

Sarah Newton applies for linen to make her two shifts. It is agreed to allow her linen to make her one.

A few years later she was making herself useful.

5/1/1830

Sarah Newton to have 3/- for attending on a woman traveller taken ill.

In her old age Sarah seemed to be loosing it:

10/12/1835

The conduct of Sarah Newton an inmate in the house is reported to be so refractory that her allowance of 1/6 per week is to be suspended.

(5) George Boyes and his wife Jane were living in Newcastle, where he had been working as a weaver. When he became unable to work they decided to return to Ayton where he had a 'settlement' (see below). They were placed in the poor house:

13/3/1838

A letter has been received from the overseers of All Saints Parish, Newcastle, respecting George Boyes who is ill. The overseers are requested to reply to the said letter and desire them to give him necessary relief.

22/1/1829

George Boyes and his wife have come from Newcastle for relief, he having been lame and unable to work at his weaving business. Their situation is referred to the overseers until next Vestry.

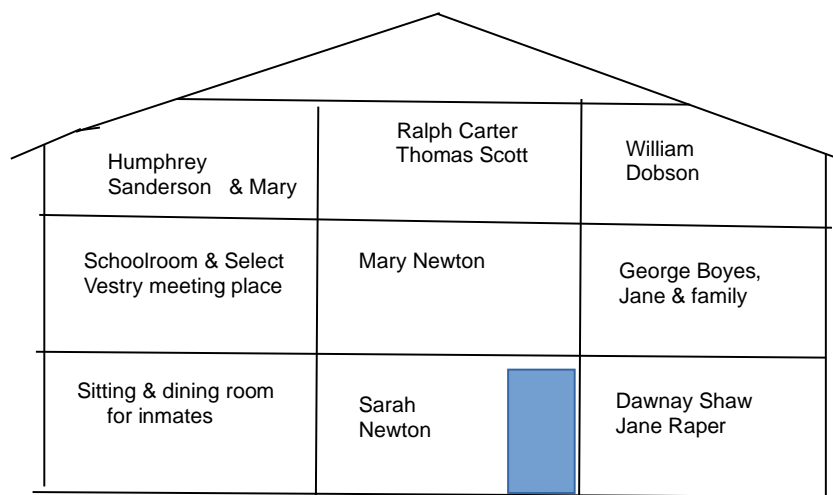
5/2/1829

The overseers report George Boyes and his wife have come into the poor house & that they have provided him a loom to work on, and that they are to provide him with some necessary things – a pair of weavers brushes & a shuttle.

8/12/1829

Geo Boyes to have 1½ bushels of coal allowed every two weeks on account of the dampness of their house [in August!].

This diagram of the poor house with its different inmates is a suggestion based on the 1841 census returns.



Other houses for the poor

As mentioned above, it is often difficult to know whether someone seeking relief was living in the poor house or renting somewhere else. The parish owned, or rented, certain other houses into which the poor could be put at a reduced rent. Just to confuse matters it seems that sometimes these also are called poor houses:

4/3/1824

The overseers are desired to make enquiry against next meeting how many houses they can take in the town at £2.2s or £2.10s rent.

10/3/1836

Jane Simonson's house to have a new window and the floor laid with paving tiles or bricks.

Probably this house, along with others in the village, was rented. The tenant, Jane Simonson, received poor relief in the shape of her rent, on the condition that other paupers could have rooms there.

13/1/32

It is agreed that Ralph Richardson is to have three pounds given towards buying a house and the overseers are authorised to borrow two or three pounds more for him to be paid out of the poor account in twelve months provided he can meet with a house that the overseers and churchwardens approve of.

As well as houses rented out to paupers by the parish there were three small cottages at the west end of the High Street which were at this time owned by the Stokesley work house authorities. Ayton paid annual rent on these. In 1857, under the new poor law, the Stokesley Poor Law Union sold the cottages to David Bottomley, joiner, who probably rebuilt them, adding another storey.

6/11/1827

The overseers are directed to examine the poor houses down town and get the windows & chimneys repaired as they may need.

And again

24/4/1828

The overseers are directed to get the poor houses repaired and the steps rebuilt.

The main village poor house hardly needed steps (except the ones at the side leading to the school room), so this entry may also refer to the 'poor houses down town'.

OUTDOOR RELIEF

As mentioned above, all towns in North Yorkshire, and many villages, had their own poor houses by the early 19th century. Nevertheless, most of the poor who needed help from their parish got it in the form of outdoor relief. This could be clothing and shoes, coal, and also money, either as a weekly sum, or requested for a particular purpose such as paying the rent. It was rarely food

because this would have meant the overseers had to buy it, store it somewhere dry, and then deliver it. Nevertheless, food was occasionally delivered:

8/6/1826

John Elliot applies for relief. It is agreed for him to have 2 stone of bread meal, and the overseers are to endeavour to get him work at the Chymic Mill [probably one of the two linseed oil mills in the village].

19/7/1827

John Elliott to have a pair of breeches and 11 yards of olive cotton at 6d per yard for childrens frocks.

There were still several tanneries in the village from which leather could be obtained to encourage self-help by suitably skilled paupers:

26/6/1823

Jane Appleton is to be provided with half a dozen skins to make gloves, for which she is to reimburse the overseers by 1s 6d per week off her cess.

WORK

One of the Select Vestry's tasks was to act as an employment agency, encouraging those on relief to find work whenever possible. The most basic work offered was breaking stones to use on the roads, under the direction of the village surveyors of the highways. Whether this involved working with sandstone from local quarries or the much harder whinstone is uncertain, but whichever it was it must have been exhausting work. It is surprising that occasionally even women were set to this task::

16/6/1831

Elizabeth Sturdy applies for additional relief, ordered to go to work on high road.

Another common instruction, often given to boys and younger men, was 'to go about' among the local farmers. These 'roundsmen', as they were called, received a small basic wage from the farmer plus a supplement from the parish. It was not a particularly popular occupation because, from the farmer's point of view, there was a lack of experience and continuity, and from the point of view of other farm labourers it was unfair competition, tending to lower wages generally.

28/11/1822

It is agreed that the men going about are to be paid 3d per day instead of 6d by those who employ them.

22/1/1829

There being considerable dissatisfaction respecting the paupers going about, by some employing them and others, it is agreed that they have their meat where they work, and their families to be relieved according to the following scale [depending on how many children in the family]. Also that care be taken that they go regularly about from 6 o'clock in the morning to 6 o'clock in the evening.

Like other villages in the area such as Hutton Rudby and Osmotherley, Ayton was a centre for linen weaving, and the overseers sometimes bought looms for children whose parents wanted them to learn the weaving trade, or for unemployed weavers.

28/2/1822

Richard Lamb Jnr. has had a loom bought him £2.10s, which he is to repay by instalments of one shilling a week till May-day, and two shillings a week after that time til the whole is redeemed.

(See also page 15 for the case of George Boyes)

2/5/1822

Mary Weatherill applies for assistance to get a loom for her son, she having agreed with John Longstaff to take him for five years and to pay him two shillings a week for learning him how to weave. It is agreed to assist her therewith, and the overseers are particularly requested to inform John Longstaff that the loom is to remain the property of the Township and not to be removed without notice to the overseers for the time being.

However, by about 1830 domestic linen weaving was in decline everywhere due to competition from new factories, and consequently unemployment among weavers was on the increase.

24/6/1830

There being several weavers in the town out of work, and it appearing that weaving may be had for them from a manufactory concern in Darlington on condition that two looms and be employed to work webs 10 quarters wide, it is agreed that one loom be provided at the township's expence for that purpose in order that the others may [have work].

Occasionally, other kinds of work are mentioned:

20/2/1821

William Websters wife having applied for cess, he having constant work, no relief is allowed except a horse and cart to lead him ling to make brooms of. [the horse and cart would have to be paid for by instalments]

31/1/1828

It is agreed to pay a fee of £2 to Rbt. Featherstone for Ann Shaw's daughter to learn the business of straw bonnet & mantua maker for one year; viz. £1 on entering & £1 at the expiry of the said year. [mantua: a woman's loose gown – more typical of an earlier age]

James Cook was a shoemaker by trade, but now a pauper (and no relation of the explorer). He had a large family and what seems to have been an incurable, lingering illness. During one traumatic year he was offered all the kinds of work the overseers had in their repertoire, but seemingly in vain.

14/3/1822

James Cook says he has got constant work at the Allum Works at Lofthouse and wants four shillings to buy a shovel with and five shillings per week to support him till the pay day.

30/5/1822

James Cook having left his wife and 5 children chargeable to the township, it is agreed for them to have 6/- a week, and the overseers are to enquire after him.

11/7/1822

Jas Cook complaining unwell in a similar complaint as last year is to have a box of pills & a bottle the same as he had before, which the overseers are to get for him, and to relieve the family occasionally.

2/8/1822

Jas Cook applies for relief. He is ordered to be set to work to break stones for the high road.

5/9/1822

James Cook being out of work, he is ordered to go about among the farmers.

3/10/1822

James Cook being unable to work any longer from a complaint he has had upon him for some time, it is agreed that Dr Loy is to take him under his care, and the overseers are to report what will be necessary to support his family while he is out of work, and to relieve them if needful at that time.

12/12/1822

The overseers are to provide Jas Cook with some leather for cobbling, and it is to lay at Mr Mastons [a weaver], and he is to pay for it as he takes it away.

CHILDREN & APPRENTICES

'Illegitimate' children were a source of concern to the parish since they and their mothers might have to be maintained for many years. Consequently, there was always a search for the fathers. who would be brought before the law if they refused to pay for their childrens' maintenance.

20/11/1834

Martha Easby, aged upwards of 15 years, having had a child to Robt. Thurstill which is 6 weeks old, agreed that he is to be attached before the magistrates on Sat. 22nd.

25/11/1834

Re Martha Easbys child, the mother being unable to maintain it, it is given up to the parish. It is agreed to allow Jane Metcalf 2/- per week to maintain the said child.

And then there was the case of Elizabeth Worthy, who kept changing her mind:

24/6/1824

Elizabeth Worthy having got married to a person belonging Stokesley, and refusing to keep her child for 1/8d per week as of order of the magistrates, it is agreed that Jane Wilson have it at 2/- per week, and to find it clothes, which she agrees to do.

22/7/1824

The overseers report that Eliz Worthy has taken her child to keep at 1/8d per week, the sum allowed by the Magistrates Order.

19/8/1824

The overseers report that Eliz Worthy has brought her child to the parish and they have placed it with Jane Wilson at 2s a week, and that she is to be made to pay the part towards the maintenance which is laid on by the magistrates Order, and the child being in want of some clothes, the overseers are to get it such as are needful.

19/1/1825

Jane Wilson has made application for a frock, two shirts, a petticoat and an apron for Eliz Worthy's boy, which is agreed to.

A boy apprenticed to a tailor by the parish was able, when grown up, to acquire his own apprentice with parish help.

2/8/1821

It is agreed with Wm Shaw of Great Ayton, taylor, to take Anderson Shaw as apprentice to be a taylor under Parish Indentures, to have two pound paid on signing his Indentures, and a pair of shoes for the first year, two pounds for the second year, and one pound for the third year. The overseers to pay for the Indentures.

25/9/34

John Longstaff applies for £2 to bind his son Joseph to Anderson Shaw tailor, Ayton which is allowed

The overseers could apply pressure on parents who were reluctant to send their children out to work:

1/11/1821

The overseers are requested to inform the parents of children that are fit for service to get them out to place, otherwise their cess will be discontinued.

8/12//1829

James Cook & Thomas Garbutt refusing to let their children go out apprentice, the overseers are directed to reduce their cess 1/- per week each.

7/12/31

Ralph Richardson applies for relief being still unable to work for a livelihood. He is to have 10/- and the O'seers are to inform him that if he keeps his son John he is not to have it.

DOCTORS & HEALTH

The typhus

There are occasional references to typhus fever in the parish. This was a disease borne by body lice, and caused by over-crowding and bad sanitation. The year 1818 must have been particularly bad:

1818-19

To Doctor Loy as per bill for medicine and attendance to 11 families in the typhus fever and other paupers. £68-8-0.

And later:

17/2/1825

Jane Dobson applies for pay for attendance two weeks on Thomas Hunter's family when in the typhus fever. It is agreed to give her £1.0.0.

18/8/1825

[Dr.] Thomas Wilson applies for payment of a Bill amounting to £1/12/- for Tho Hunter's family when in the Typhus fever. Also Wm Brown for another Bill for milk amounting to 5/6d. during the 9 weeks that Tho Hunter was himself in said fever.

21/10/1830

Wm Thorobeck's wife being ill in the typhus fever the overseers are particularly requested to attend to the situation of this family and relieve them as their needs may require.

In August 1832, at a public meeting, a committee was set up to prepare for a possible arrival in Ayton of an even more infectious disease, the 'Asiatic cholera', known to have appeared in nearby villages such as Hutton Rudby. .

30/8/1832

It was resolved that in consequence of the near approach of the alarming disease the Asiatic cholera, this meeting deems it necessary to form a committee to make all needful preparations.

That the two surgeons in the village have authority to visit, and to supply with medicines, any poor persons in this parish immediately that they are found to be attacked with the symptoms of cholera.

That Messrs T. Loy, J. Bowron, T. Richardson, J. Richardson, J. Jackson & J. Ibbetson be desired to inspect the village. . . and to require that all nuisances be immediately removed.

That Mr Bowron and the overseers have power to supply any of the poor with lime for whitewashing.

Doctors

28/2/1825

Wheras Dr Loy has declined making his proposal for medical attendance on the poor of this parish for one year, it is therefore agreed to let it by proposal and notice thereof is to be given by the overseers to the medical gentlemen of Stokesley, Gisborough and Ayton.

4/3/1825

Agreeable to the minute of last meeting, proposals have been received from James Allardyce, John Cook and Richard Appleton of Stokesley, Richd. Appletons being for 2/- per head, John Cooks for £10/10s. per annum, and James Allardices for £7 per annum. It is agreed that James Allardyce is to be employed for one year to attend all these poor people.

26/5/1825

A complaint has been made against Doctor Allardice for being drunk when attending a patient. Dr Mackereth is requested to attend Dr Allardice at Wm Steadmans to examine what state he is in, and John Richardson Esq, Thos Graham esq, Philip Hesleton esq, and

Wm Browne are desired to attend them and report to the Vestry meeting whether he has been properly treated. This meeting adjourns till tomorrow evening at 6 o'clock.

27/5/1825

Dr Mackereth having attended Wm Steadman with three of this committee, reports that it is his decided opinion that there is no fracture of the thigh bone. . . but he is in a very poor state of health and that he believes that the medicine he has had from Dr Allardice has been proper. The charge against Dr Allardice is entirely rejected and disbelieved.

18/1/1826

Whereas seval complaints have been made to the Vestry that Doctor Allardice does not attend to the poor people when he is sent for, he is to be requested either to give such attendance as he is called to require, or to give up.

2/3/1826

The minute respecting Doctor Allardices attendance of the paupers not being substantiated, the same is discharged.

In spite of this exoneration, on 27 April the same year it was decided from now on to employ Dr John Cook of Stokesley to attend the poor people of Ayton for the next year. Dr Loy also resumed his services for the poor.

AMERICA

This was a time of increasing emigration from Britain to Australia, Canada or America. The Ayton Select Vestry was cautious about assisting poor families to emigrate owing to the expense of the voyage. By this date steam ships crowded with emigrants might take ten days to reach New York, leaving from Stockton or Whitby. Steerage class families lived in cramped conditions in which to sleep and to cook, with basic foods usually provided by the ship.

The Napper family were the first to be helped by the Vestry,, and this only because the Lady of the Manor of Stokesley had involved herself in their case. It is likely that Thomas Napper had a settlement in Ayton although living in Stokesley.

21/6/30

Thomas Napper applies for £5 to go to America with his wife and 3 children. and the money is to be forwarded to Miss Hildyard of Stokesley to be paid to her on her assurance that they have sailed from England.

Two years later the Vestry thought they might raise the money to support another family by asking for donations from the village.

14/6/1832

Special meeting for considering the propriety of sending Ric Wilson and family to America. It is agreed that Humphrey Sanderson be desired to solicit the landowners in the township for a subscription.

Only after a first refusal was the Webster family also assisted. The cost to the parish was partly to be raised by loans from wealthier landowners.

3/2/1832

Wm Webster applies for assistance to carry his wife & 5 children to America – refused.

19/4/1832

William Webster; attending him & family to Whitby to ship off to America: £4/12/11 plus £28 for the freight and provisions of him and family. £8/12/11 to come from this years rate and the remaining £24 borrowed, to be paid back by instalments of £8 per year

14/6/1832

Michael Bradley applies for pay for assisting to take Wm Websters family to Whitby with his horse and cart. Agreed for him to have 15/-.

The Sherwood family, who had already received parish relief, also decided to leave.

13/1/32

Robert Sherwood applies for the parish to find him a house to live in which is refused, but the overseers are to allow his mother sixpence a week for his lodging for a few weeks.

26/1/1832

Robt. Sherwood, being out of work, is to be employed breaking stones, and to have 1/-.

9/2/32

Robert Sherwood wants a shirt and a pair of shoes and money to carry him and his family to America. The overseers are to make enquiry what they can get a passage for. from Whitby, and report back.

After a long delay the Select Vestry finally agreed to help this family emigrate.

8/4/1834

Special meeting to consider the propriety of assisting Rob. Sherwood, his wife and 3 children to America. Agreed that the township assist them with £11 for passage money and provision during the voyage. The overseers are particularly directed to attend getting said provisions for them, pay their passage and see the family on board the vessel purposing sailing from Stockton 1st of month.

But the overseers did not actually see the family on board. It seems that Robert Sherwood decided at the last minute to leave his family in Whitby and join the ship by himself, contradicting the Vestry's plan for the whole family to go.

22/5/1834

Jane Sherwood, wife of Robt Sherwood, has applied for relief, her husband having left her and three children and gone to America. It is agreed she is to be offered a room in this house and have three shillings a week cess.

SETTLEMENTS

An act of 1662 set down the ways someone might claim a settlement from a particular parish, so as to apply for relief These included: having being born there or, in the case of a woman, having a

husband who himself had a settlement there.

5/7/1821

Application has been made for assistance for Eliz. Clark, wife of \Wm. Clark, who being now very ill and her husband off on a voyage at sea, it is resolved that the overseers are to get her medical advice and whatever more is needful, but some doubt appears as to where Wm. Clarks legal settlement is. As soon as he comes home he is to be taken to the magistrates to prove his settlement.

Another way to claim a settlement from a parish was to show that one had been hired to work there for more than a year:

10/12/1832

Wm Ruddick applies for relief claiming his settlement at Ayton by living with Mark Barker at Angrove Hall in the years 1815 & 1816, since when he says he has not made a year's servitude in one place, but returned from Mark Barker to his parents at Eggescliffe with whom he stopped a few weeks and then went from thence intending for America but got no further than Liverpool. After working there a short time he went to London, where there, and near there, he has resided ever since, working in different situations, as labourer in St Catherine Docks, among the scavengers, & with one or two cowkeepers as cowman, etc. It is agreed that he be employed on the high road and to lodge in the poor house.

William Ruddick was successful, but the next applicant unfortunately not:

23/10/1828

Joseph Pearson, Whitby, applies for relief claiming his settlement at Ayton under the following circumstances – says he lived one year a hired servant with Bartholemew Stelling at Greenhay Hill and after that one year with Fotherley Pannell M.D., both in the township of Ayton in or about the years 1794/1795, and after leaving his last years service with Doctor Pannell he went and resided at Whitby during the winter season and went on a Greenland voyage in the spring [this would be a whaling voyage], and after returning from there engaged himself in a small vessel in the London trade, and has been in the seafaring line till the present time having never served a year in one place since, nor gained any settlement. The overseers are directed to make all necessary enquiry against our next meeting and report, and it is agreed to give him 11/- for his present need.

Enquiries were started as to this account, but to verify it took several months, and by the time the Vestry was prepared to give him relief, it was too late:

23/2/1832

A letter has been received from the overseers of Whitby giving an account of the death of Joseph Pearson of that place who belonged to this parish, and wanting cess for the support of his widow and payment of his funeral expenses. The overseers are to pay the charges and request the overseers to pay her two shillings a week of cess if less will not do for her.

Even with a settlement, no parish relief would be given if it was thought the applicant could be looked after by their own family:

-28/2/1822

Application has been made for more cess for Ann Fordy of Newcastle, but it appears that she has a son in the Sheriff Hill Pottery and another son an inn-keeper at Darlington who are considered able and liable to maintain her – the overseers are therefore directed to enquire into their situation and report at the next meeting.

Sometimes settlement claims involved complex legal issues. Another way to claim was if one rented or owned a house in Ayton worth more than £10 a year in rentable value.

23/12/1824

In consequence of William Swan not belonging Ayton at the time of his marriage, the overseers are requested to make enquiry if the house his wife was supposed to be owner of at that time, which his widow now lives in, will gain her a settlement in Ayton, as it appears she is only half-owner of it in joint with her sister who have it for their lives, and then it becomes the property of the heir at law, and their interest in the said house then ceases.

20/1/1825

The overseers have examined the writings of Prudence Swan's house, and from what appears therein it seems she is likely to belong to Ayton, unless the will by which the said house was left to her mother can be found and ascertain more particularly how the same is left to her and her heirs.

The settlement system could be open to abuse. Employers often hired labourers for just under a year to stop them gaining a settlement. There are also accounts of unmarried women who were about to give birth being forcibly removed from their homes to another parish so as to avoid their babies gaining a settlement. Also, a case of a woman forced to marry a pauper from another parish, thus altering her settlement. There is no evidence of such abuses in the Ayton records.

Growing industrialisation in parts of Britain such as the West Riding led to the increasing mobility of labour, as farm workers looked for work in the new mines and factories, and this in turn meant the settlement system was becoming increasingly complex and difficult to enforce. It was finally abolished by the act of 1834 that brought in the New Poor Law.

POOR RATES

The poor rate was levied on owners, or renters, of property, assessed on the value of their land or house. The rate in Ayton at this time was 1d. for each £1 worth of land, and ½d. per £1 on house value. To take one year as an example: in 1816-17 (a difficult year, soon after the ending of the long war against France) this tax raised £551/16/2d. from 104 rate payers (only eight of them women). The population of the parish at this date was about 1000. To this sum were added contributions from two small charities as well as income from other towns and villages whose poor had been relieved by the parish during the year. The poor rate had to be collected twice a year by the overseers. Very occasionally they ran up against difficulties (see also page 5).

12/8/1823

For the purpose of considering the propriety of proceeding against Joseph Carling, he refusing to pay his poor rate. It is agreed that the overseers take legal means accordingly for the recovery thereof.

21/8/1823

The overseers report they obtained a warrant of distress against Joseph Carling for recovering of his poor rate, which he relented to pay and all expenses thereon.

The more demanding side of the overseers' task was to decide how to spend what they had collected, and on whom, though here they did have the instructions of the Select Vestry to guide them. During the 34 years between 1794 and 1828 the money spent on the Ayton poor went up from £252 in 1793-4 to £755 in 1827-8. These were years, first of war, and then of intermittent crises affecting farming and industry. Obviously, the poor rate also had to treble. It says a lot for the sense of community in a village like Ayton that, so far as we know, there was no co-ordinated opposition by the rate payers to these increases in tax. Perhaps this was because everyone could see how their money was being spent. Also, because the poor rate was a highly progressive tax in that the well-off paid many times more than the poor. To come back to the year 1816-17, the majority of cottage owners were rated at 1d., but Bartholemew Rudd, for instance, who owned Aireyholme, the largest farm in the parish, was rated at 16/8d – in other words, 100 times as much. John Richardson of Langbaugh, with his tannery, was rated at 13/10½d. and Philip Hesleton, with his linseed oil mill, at 8/10½d. What they actually paid depended on how many “cesses” were demanded by the overseers during the year. In 1816-17 the number was 24, so that an ordinary cottager paid 2/- for that year, and Bartholemew Rudd, £20.

THE NEW POOR LAW

In 1834 the Poor Law Amendment Act introduced far reaching changes to the Old Poor Law. In charge of the new system were three poor law commissioners based at Somerset House in London. Its purpose was to create a poor law that was nationally uniform, and also cheaper to run. Instead of the parish, decisions would now be taken by the union of several parishes, each union with its large central workhouse where all those needing relief had to go. No longer were poor people to stay at home and receive outdoor relief, such as clothing or work tools or help to pay the rent. Villages were no longer supposed to have their own poor houses, but to send their paupers to the union workhouse.

To save money and make the system work properly it was felt necessary to discourage people from entering the workhouse unless they absolutely had to. Therefore conditions were kept harsh. Married couples were separated from each other, and from their children. Food was basic and often inadequate. Not for nothing was the 1834 act labelled ‘the starvation act’. Charles Dickens agreed, and composed his famous scene where Oliver Twist creates a sensation by asking for more.

However, especially in the north of England, the New Poor Law took a long time to impose. Both paupers and rate payers were on the whole fairly content with the old parochial system, and didn't see why it had to change. Outdoor relief often went on being distributed, and village poor houses like Ayton's continued for some years to offer indoor relief to the elderly and infirm. It was not until 1848 that the Stokesley Union closed down their old workhouse in College Square, and built a new, larger one on the outskirts of town – a place where Ayton's poor were probably even less likely to want to live than before.

In a village like Ayton the Old Poor Law seems to have been a fairly humane system which provided a safety net for the village's poor and destitute. Ayton had two advantages which many other villages of a similar size lacked. One was a school for poorer children subsidised by the

parish, and the other, a basic medical service where a doctor was contracted annually to look after the village's paupers. The Old Poor Law has been described as 'a welfare state in miniature', and it was probably more popular than the fairly ruthless arrangements that followed.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

My most important sources have been the minutes of the Ayton Select Vestry, 1821-1836 (PR/AYG 4/4) and of the Ayton Overseers of the poor, 1791-1828 (PR/AYG 9/1), both in the North Yorkshire County Record Office, Northallerton. Books consulted include the two volumes on North Riding History by R. P. Hastings, 1981 & 1984, especially the second volume, pages 19 to 34. Also J. Walker Ord's *History of Cleveland*, 1846, M Heavisides' *Rambles in Cleveland*, 1909, and R. Kettlewell's *Cleveland Village*. As I mentioned before, I wrote during the covid lockdown so didn't have access to libraries. Anyone wanting to follow up this topic might want to look at Paul Hastings' PhD thesis on poverty in the North Riding which I think is in York University library.