



THE PAUPER APPRENTICES OF LINGFIELD

By the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, in 1603, Poor Law legislation was firmly rooted in local government. Each parish administered its own poor relief via overseers who were appointed by magistrates. Overseers were empowered to levy poor rates on property which the magistrates were to enforce.

In rural areas much of the work was seasonal, wages were often paid irregularly and since a large part of them might be in kind rather than cash, many agricultural labourers and their families depended on parish relief during the winter months. Most labourers, who lived close to the borderline of subsistence, had at one time or another in their lives resorted to parish relief. In the workhouse families were split up according to their suitability for work.

[The Lingfield Workhouse, now The Garth, Newchapel Road, is the subject of a separate RH7 fact-sheet: 'The Workhouse' by Sue Quelch, May 2004]

'Able-bodied' children were commonly apprenticed to a trade to make them self-sufficient. Some of the Indentures relating to local apprenticeship agreements have survived among the parish records. All pauper apprentices were entirely at the mercy of their 'Master'. Although no evidence of ill treatment has been found in local records there are many instances elsewhere. Apprenticeship schemes were generally a method of 'disposing' of workhouse children. Private employers were offered a premium to take a child off the hands of the parish. The children were exploited having been abandoned by the parish overseers.

John Kempe's Indenture, below, is an example of payment from parish officials to a private employer in return for many years of cheap labour. As the employer had the same name as the child they were probably related.

[Spellings are as the original in all the following indentures]

*Indenture...[during] the reign of our Sovereign King Charles the
Second...[1680]*

*John Kempe one of the poore children of the parrish of Lingfield
Apprentice to an Smith John Kempe...to abide dwell and
sewe...during all the time and until the said John Kempe shall*

attain to his age of four and twenty yeares during which all said time the said John Kempe Apprentice to the said John Kempe as his Master will faithfully and truly serve...and shall keep the Commandments...

Games he shall not play [nor] Matrimony with any Woman during the said [time]

Neither by day nor by night absent or withdraw himself but as a true and faithfull servant shall behave and deameane himself as well in words and in deeds towards his said Master... And the said John Kempe for an consideration of the sum of five pounds of lawfull money of England...

Shall instruct the art and calling of good husbandry...

[£5 in 1680 was approx. equal to £365 now, *Retail Price Index – 1987*. In the 18th century ‘husbandry’ was a generic term for farmers, usually tenant farmers as distinct from yeomen.]

Young Girls were often procured from the parish authorities as a cheap form of domestic labour.

Indenture this twenty eighth day of the first year of the reign of our sovereign Lady Queen Ann by the Grace of God Queen of England Scotland France and Ireland...[1702]

Witnesseth John Piggott and George Swaynesland Churchwardens of ye parrish of Lingfield in ye County of Surrey and John Underhill and Richard Turner Overseers of the Poore of ye said parrish by and with ye consent of her Majestys Justices of ye peace of the said County whose names are here unto subscribed...put and placed Elizabeth Holms a poore Child of ye said parrish Apprentice her with Richard Underhill with him to abide dwell and lerne from ye day of ye date of these present for and during all ye time and until the said Elizabeth Holms shall attain to ye age of Eighteen years According to ye statute... [She] will faithfully and truly shall serve in all lawfull bissinesses...and behave herself toward her said Master...

The said Richard Underhill shall will direct teach and inform ye said Elizabeth Holms...ye Way of good housewifery whereby she may be able ...to Earn her living...[she shall have] sufficient Meate Drink Apparel Lodging Washing and all things Necessary...that she be not Anyway a charge to ye said Parrish...

[Richard Underhill] will provide double Apparel the first for holy days and another for working days...

Not all children were apprenticed in the local community the following two indentures, of 1762 and 1764 respectively, are examples. Thomas Martin was only six and a half years when he was apprenticed to a weaver at West Hoathly. He could not play nor marry until he was 'free' at the age of twenty four. He was set to spend the next 18 years of his life learning the mystery of weaving. 'Mystery' was then a common term meaning craft, art, skill or trade.

Indenture the third year of the reign of our sovereign King George the Third...[1762]

Witnesseth George Lee and George Dives Churchwardens of ye parrish of Lingfield in ye County of Surrey and Thomas Prichard and James Browning Overseers of the Poore of ye said parrish by and with ye consent of her Majestys Justices of ye peace of the said County whose names are here unto subscribed...

Thomas Martin aged six yeares and a halfe or thereabouts a poore child of ye parrish Apprentice to Robert Webb of West Hoathly in the County of Sussex Weaver with him to dwell and serve from the date of these present until the Apprentice shall accomplish his full age of four and twenty yeares...

Robert Webb shall instruct the said Apprentice in the art and mystery of a Weaver...

In 1764 ten year old Richard Crayford left Lingfield for Withyham to learn the trade of Cordwainer. Cordwainers were shoemakers. The word is derived from the Spanish for Leather – as in Cordoba, the Spanish leather capital; 'wain' is to work – hence workers of

leather. Cordwainers worked with new leather, as opposed to cobblers who repaired old leather. In practice cordwainers also made many other leather objects, such as leather bottles.

Indenture this seventh day of July in the fifth year of the reign of our sovereign King George the Third...[1764]

Witnesseth Thomas Exeter and Robert Head Churchwardens of ye parrish of Lingfield in ye County of Surrey and Robert Bristy and William Akehurst Overseers of the Poore...

Richard Crayford son of Matthew Crayford aged ten yeares or thereabouts a poore child of ye parrish Apprentice to John Waters of the parrish of Withyham in the County of Sussex cordwainer...until the full age of four and twenty yeares

Towards the end of the 18th century various laws were introduced to protect the children. An Act of 1792 ordered that should a master die an apprentice should have his indentures cancelled. The Act of 1793 authorised punishment of constables and overseers for neglect of duty, it also provided for punishing masters for all ill-usage of apprentices.

Following the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 the practice of apprenticing boys by payment to any employer who would take them off the parish's hands had been officially forbidden. Even so the Guardians of East Grinstead Union agreed, on 5th November 1835, that:

A premium of 10 shillings to be given for each child who may be permanently placed out from these schools as either servants or apprentices

Several paupers were encouraged to find work in the developing industrial areas of England. In 1835 George Greenwood of Lingfield told the Board of his desire to migrate to a manufacturing district (his Master, Mr Edward Banks had given good references) and the Board advanced him a loan of £1 for travelling expenses to be repaid out of his earnings. The Overseers Accounts show that payments were made for paupers to travel to America to find work.

In 1836 the Poor Law Commissioners approved the placing out of local Parish Boys as Apprentices to Chimney Sweeps.

Workhouse Masters were encouraged to employ paid instructors to teach trades in the Workhouse environment. Most workhouses prepared their young male inmates for semi-skilled manual occupations requiring little capital, especially shoe-making. In May 1836 George Daulton, an inmate of East Grinstead workhouse, was paid to attend at Lingfield to mend shoes and teach the boys shoemaking – 3 days at Lingfield and 3 days at East Grinstead.

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Sources:

Lingfield Parish Records, Surrey History Centre, Woking [P/2399]

All the Apprenticeship Indentures are loose and of poor quality, some are only partially legible due to water damage, most are soiled and creased. Microform copies are available at Lingfield Library.

West Sussex County Record Office, Union Workhouse, Minute Books of Guardians [G4/1a/1]

The Evolution of the British Welfare State, Derek Fraser

A Dictionary of Old Trades, Titles and Occupations, Colin Waters