

THE CARE OF THE POOR IN NAILSEA

1679 – 1819

By

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THE POOR RATE

The first Act for the levy of a Poor Rate in England was passed in 1572, codified in 1597 - 8 and consolidated in 1601, and for the first time the care of the poor, the aged and those in ill-health became the responsibility of the community in which they lived.

Overseers were appointed to work in co-operation with the Churchwardens in raising a fund by which a levy on house-holders and land owners in each parish, rated according to the value of the property they owned, and to make payments to those in need as and when they were considered to be necessary.

(In the period we are considering, village affairs were controlled by the Vestry, an annual meeting of property holding parishioners. The officers, appointed by the Vestry, were two Churchwardens (the Rector's Warden and the people's Warden), the Village Constable, the Overseer of the Poor and the Surveyor of the Highways.)

The system persisted for more than two hundred years from its inception until, early in the nineteenth century, the rapid growth of the population, especially among the poor, and the widespread distress and poverty that accompanied the growth of industry (in spite of the prosperity of the nation as a whole) made the administration unwieldy and laid too great a burden upon the contributors to the rate.

The new Poor Law of 1834 reorganised the whole system with Boards of Guardians elected by the rate-payers, working with greater efficiency but with a harsher moral attitude towards paupers. Relief for the able-bodied poor was now forbidden except within a Workhouse where conditions were deliberately made repellent; and there was stricter control over all expenditure from the Poor Rate.

THE POOR RATE IN NAILSEA

We are fortunate in Nailsea in having detailed records of the Overseers' Accounts covering a large part of the period during which the first Poor Law was in operation. Three books of accounts for the years 1697 – 1738, 1739 – 1795 and 1795 – 1819 are now preserved in the Nailsea Public Library. They are transcriptions from the original documents (now lost) written in beautiful copper-plate script about a hundred years ago by E G Doggett of Bristol. The books appear to be accurate transcriptions carefully preserving the original wording and spelling, however quaint these may now seem to us. Some of the original signatures have been traced and notes were made where pages were missing or entries indecipherable.

It is an enormous advantage, of course, to have such pleasant and legible documents to work from.

The accounts give details showing how the Overseers were appointed, who they were, how the Poor Rate was raised and from whom, and, in great detail, how the moneys were disbursed. The names of parishioners responsible for these appointment were recorded (the Vestry) as well as those of local justices or other prominent citizens who scrutinised and approved the annual balance sheets.

At first, that is from 1679 onwards, the Overseers were appointed annually with Churchwardens, two of each, to raise and administer the Poor Rate:

We whose names are hereunto Sett two of his Majesties Justices of the peace for the Said County of Somersett Do appoint Daniell Durban and (?) of the Parish of Nailsea in the said County together with the Churchwardens of that Parish to be overseers of the Poor there of for one whole Year next ensueing the Date hereof According to the forme of the Statute in that Case made and provided Given under our hands and Seals this Ninth Day of May 1734....

Sometimes Waywardens (who cared for the highways) were appointed at the same time as the Overseers:

"Wee the parishirs of Naylzey doe Cosent as Ffolloweth
John Tucker & Richard Wilmot Overseares
Robert Teserd & Richard Vimpany Way Wardens
May ye 13 th 1680
Seen & Allowed by us

H Smyth
John Pigott"

Later only one Overseer was appointed to work with Churchwarden; and eventually (from about 1720) the whole matter was left in the hands of a single Overseer appointed, or re-appointed, annually.

The appointments were usually made from among their own fellows by the Vestry or, perhaps, by a smaller group of prominent property holders. It may not always have been easy to find a volunteer for the responsibility and time-consuming position of Overseer, as, for example in 1726:

"We whose names are hereunto subscribed do Make Choice of the widd(ow)
Morgan for Battens & Doctor Rodgers for Baylies to find sufficient men to serve ye
Offices of Churchwarden and Overseer of ye Poor for ye Present Yeaere."

It is interesting to note that the first recorded Overseer for Nailsea was John Whiting, a Quaker, who 'served the office' (with Edmond Twitt) in 1679. He was a member of a well known Quaker family who lived at King's Hill in a cottage that still survives. At this time Quakers were persecuted by the 'establishment' of the Restoration; and John's sister Mary was sent to prison for refusing to take an oath of allegiance. John himself went to prison at 'Ivelchester' in 1681 and was released in 1686. He died 1722.

Sometimes the name of the Rector appeared in the early records. Until 1811 Nailsea Holy Trinity Church was a Chapel of Wraxall and there was no separate Rectory in Nailsea until then. Nevertheless the Rector was a leading rate-payer, ranking next to the owner or tenant of "The Corte"; and his influence was such that on one occasion he alone signed the approval for the annual accounts. It was normal practice, however, for the accounts to be 'allowed' by representatives of the Vestry and verified on oath before local Justices of the Peace:

To Witt Ratified allowed and confirmed by us Two of his Majestyes Justices of the peace for the sd County whereof one is the Quorum this 17 th day of September 1742.

Among the Justice named were members of well known local families, Gorge of Wraxall, Smyth of Ashton Park, Pigott of Brockley, Elton of Clevedon, Seymour (of Kingston?), Morgan, Durbin, Greville, Codrington and Stratchey.

The books show, for each year from 1679 onwards, "an account of the Receivings, Layings out and Disburstments" by the Overseers, whose duties, however, were not clearly defined; and the assessment, collection and disbursement of the Rate seems to have been left entirely to their discretion, subject only to the annual scrutiny and allowance by the Vestry and Justices.

The contributions collected from the various property holders or their tenants seem to have come in with great regularity and only one or two rare cases of non payment are mentioned, together with the small fine imposed.

The disbursements, however, were extremely varied, so much so that it almost seems that some of them must have been random payments at the whim and fancy of the Overseer of the time. On one occasion a warning was given against careless generosity:

Aprl ye 27th 1736.. it was then Agreed on att a Vestry meeting of ye Chief Inhabitants of ye parish of Naylsey that they will not allow ye Churchwardens nor overseares of ye parish y^{tt} they shall not Give aney money to aney parsons Whatso Ever that shal Come wth aney pretended pass's or Breefs or aney Vagrant persons whatsoever.

Some questions arise concerning the collection and disbursement of the Rate which are not answered by reference to the Accounts. Were the various amounts of money, which were often very small, collected personally by the Overseer? Or where they left at his house or at some kind of office? Those in want, presumably, would apply to him directly wherever he could be found.

The payments must have been handed out in coin of the realm, but there was little 'small change' at this time and copper coins were rarely used before the nineteenth century.

It would appear that the office of Overseer was regarded as a necessary public duty that passed in turn from one parishioner to another, with little more than a token payment for the work done.

Each yearly, or half-yearly, statement included a small fee for 'serving the office' At first this was a mere 2s.6d., rising after a few years to 5s. The fee rose slowly as the scope of the work increased, to £4 per annum in 1790, remaining at this figure until 1813. There was then a sudden jump to £26 per annum in 1813 and to £28 in 1814, clearly a belated recognition that the amount of work had become a considerable burden, and that the responsibility was great enough to deserve more than a merely nominal fee. Indeed, the number of annual entries in the Accounts under the general heading of 'disbursements' rose from under 40 before 1700 to over 300 in 1800, and by that time there were long lists of regular weekly payments to families in distress.

With the rapid growth of the coal-mining and glass-working industries Nailsea had become notorious for the general depravity and rough behaviour of many of the workers and for the poverty and crowded living conditions of some of their families. The population of the parish rose from about 300 in the seventeenth century (a figure estimated from the number of recorded births, which was about 10 a year) to over 2,000 at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The number of property holders in the parish, however, increased only very slightly during this time. It is evident that the administration of the system became a heavy burden upon both the Overseer and the minority of parishioners who had to find the money.

It is very much to the credit of the successive Overseers that their accounts were always kept meticulously with every detail fully recorded. Incidental expenses such as the cost of parchment and the cost of hiring a horse to visit another parish were included as legitimate disbursements, but the amounts were always small and the Overseers were scrupulously fair in their charges.

COLLECTING AND DISBURSING THE RATE

The only large estate in the parish was Nailsea Court whose owner or tenant paid by far the largest rate. Mizzymead was then a small estate rather than a farm, owned first by Sir Edward Newell and for a large part of the eighteenth century, by the Taint (Teant, Tent or Tynte) family until taken by Mr Lucas of the Glassworks. 'Battens and Youngwood' together were highly rated; other farms mentioned in the list included names that are still familiar, Battens, Nurse, Bartletts, West End, East End, Fosters and King's Hill. Most properties, however, were identified by the names of their owners.

One of the larger contributions came from the Rector 'for the tithes', 'for the Parsonage' or 'for the Rectory'. There was no separate rectory in Nailsea before 1811 when 'Westobes' was taken over by the Church; the Rectors named (from Anketill in 1679 to Simkinson in 1799 --- the last year in which the ratepayers were named) were the incumbents of Wraxall, the mother church. It is difficult to understand the basis upon which the Rector's assessment was made, although the high rate paid by the Church was a recognition of its importance in village affairs. The Rector certainly took a prominent part in the Poor Rate affairs, sometimes helping to choose Overseers as well as Churchwardens, and at other times signifying his approval of the accounts.

The Overseers of the Poor of Wraxall were charged a rate on the Fryth, a wooded area near Pound Lane which was still considered as part of Wraxall. Smokey Hole was often mentioned (it is now Combe Grange) and 'Perrins and Blackbushes' may have referred to property near Bucklands Batch where there are fields still called 'Perrins'.

'The Ford' is still something of a mystery, but 'Hedges' was linked in 1798 with the 'Tan Yard' as the property of Mrs Baddily. 'The Glass Houses' first appeared in the rating lists in 1793 with Mr Robert Lucas as the owner.

It is surprising that no rates were recorded for the coal mining industry which was developing rapidly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Poor Rate was described in 1706 as 'A pound rate for won month and allowed by the inhabitants of the p'ish & to be collected every month during the Whole year for the maintenance of the poore by William Godwin Senior & John bayly oversears of the pore as followeth 1^d qr a pound (i.e. 1¼d. in the pound)'. It was based, presumably upon an assessment of the value of the property owned. 'Assessors' were mentioned occasionally, but not identified.

The amounts were collected by, or taken to, the Overseer annually or half yearly in the early years, but from 1706 they were shown as monthly payments.

The number of rate-payers in the seventeenth century was about 75 and the amounts paid ranged from about five shillings a month for "The Corte" down to a few pence for a large number of small properties. There were one or two householders paying as little as a halfpenny or a penny a month.

The total value of the annual rate collected and disbursed during the first few years fluctuated between twenty and forty pounds; but the amount rose steadily and by the end of the eighteenth century it had exceeded two hundred pounds. It then rose even more rapidly reaching a peak of over seven hundred pounds in 1814.

The increases were effected by raising the number of monthly contributions to be paid each year or simply by collecting the same rate two or three times over in the same year. In 1722, for example, 'two 14 month rates' were collected; and the last entry, 1819 shows:

	£	s	d
Rec ^d by 3 Rates	415	11	3¾
Part of a Rate	8	6	3¼
Arrears rec ^d	20	16	11½
Total	<u>444</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>6½</u>

The number of contributors to this large sum was still only 84.

RANGE AND VARIETY OF DISBURSEMENTS

Disbursements seem to have been entirely at the discretion of the Overseers, but the justifications for the payments, which varied widely, were always clearly stated beside the amount paid. One exception, in 1763, remains a mystery:

Pay^d for a pertickler use by the Consent of the Parish £0 10 8½

Most payments were small amounts of a shilling or two given to people said to be 'in distress', or for the care of one person by another at the rate of about 1s.6d. a week. The cost of simple articles of food and clothing were often paid, especially to women and children. Later, there were many records of regular weekly payments.

At first, when the Overseers were working together with the Churchwardens, small sums were frequently paid towards the upkeep of the Church and even for bread and wine for Communion. Other 'irregular' payments were those made towards the costs of repairing roads, cleaning ditches and the building of bridges, all of which should surely have been the responsibility of the Way Wardens.

The building and maintenance of the Poor House (sometimes called the Almshouse) was, of course, a proper charge on the Poor Rate, as was medical care; but it seems curious that the Poor Rate should have been used for building the stocks and a whipping post! (See Chapter 6).

A more worthy cause was the payment of the salary (amounting to the sum of £6.10s. a year) of the master of the school set up in Nailsea in 1798 by Hannah More. The Overseer was responsible for binding children as apprentices and for paying the necessary fees; and he had to attend to a variety of legal matters requiring visits to justices and courts or sessions, often involving the expense of hiring horses for himself and others together with appropriate refreshments on the way. Boys entering the Militia during the Napoleonic Wars were given a bounty of £5 from the Poor Rate.

Small casual payments were frequently given to strangers passing through the village, especially to those carrying a 'pass' issued in their own village, which entitled them to relief on their travels.

The costs of burials were paid for all those in need and occasionally the fees for weddings.

Payments for small wild animals including hedgehogs, badgers, polecats, otters, and once for a marten, suggest that these were regarded as vermin, best destroyed.

The following are examples of typical cases:

			£	s	d
1679	It(em)	Given to Joan Perry in her distress (there were 7 similar cases in 1679; 55 in 1797)	0	2	6
	It	Paid to John Cambridge for rent	1	8	0
	It	A cote for two peare of shews for mending of shews and one peare of hosen for Hanah Bailly	0	10	9
	It	ffor four Shifts for the children	0	6	0
1719	It	Gave to John Phillips when sick and in distress and paid for tending him before he came to Weekly pay and gave him in Cole	1	8	11
1723		Gave 2 Poore Women y ^t had great loss by fire	0	0	6

1732	Gave 3 Christians taken by y ^e Algerrens and 1 sufferer by fire	0	3	0
1797	Gave betty Bradmore for Looking after Sarah house	0	2	0
1798	Gave 3 Sailors in Distress	0	1	0
1801	Pd Hannah Day 26 Weeks at 1s6d. (from a list of 32 similar weekly payments)	1	19	0
1805	Paid for Doctoring J ^{no} Gales Hand	0	15	0

It is difficult to give anything like a complete list of the kinds of reasons given to justify gifts from the Poor Rate, but the following categories were all represented at one time or another:

- Casual gifts to those in need
- Regular weekly payments
- Payments for clothing, food or household goods
- The care of one person by another
- The care of children
- Schooling
- Medical treatment by lay people as well as by the village doctor
- Hospital treatment
- Burial expenses, grave, coffin, shroud, victuals at the funeral
- Wedding (rare)
- Repairs to the Church and wine for Communion
- Repairs to roads and ditches
- Building of bridges (including contributions towards bridges in other parishes)
- Building of the Poor House and frequent repairs
- Pepper for the Poor House chief rent
- The making of stocks and whipping post
- The King's or Queen's Tax
- Warrants, examinations, apprenticeships
- Attendance at Courts or Assizes
- Consultations with lawyers
- Travellers passing through the village
- Bounties on joining the Militia
- The taking of prisoners to court or jail
- Writing or delivery of a letter
- The killing of vermin
- The County Stock
- Serving the Office.

SOME CASE HISTORIES

A few families or individuals were continually in trouble and depended greatly upon relief from the Poor Rate, as the following

Jos Emerys and his Family

			£	s	d
1794	April	Gave Jos Emery in Distress at Sundry times when the Children was in the Small pox	1	2	6
1794	Aug.	Paid Jane Winsor for Looking after Jos Emerys and Jon Holifields family in Illness three weeks	0	18	0
	Sept.	Paid Wm Help his bill for Jos Emerys and his family in Illness	0	6	2
		Paid Prudence Hous for Siting up with Jos Emerys	0	1	0
	Oct.	Paid Jon Evans for meate had for Jos Emerys family in illness	0	2	5
	Nov.	Paid Sarah Day for making two sheets and two Bolster cases for Jos Emerys family	0	0	6
1795	Jan.	Paid for frock and three shifts for Jos Emerys children	0	6	0½
	Feb.	Gave Sarah Gale When Jos and Jon Emery was baptised	0	1	0
	Apr.	Paid Jon Young for Keeping Hannah Emery for three weeks at 1s. a week	0	3	0
	Monthly Payments	Jos Emerys 4 Children 6w at 8d.	2	8	0
		Paid Jos Emery in Distress	0	3	0
		Paid Jos Emery in Distress	0	3	0
		Paid Mary Shenton for Make and Mending for Jos Emerys Children	0	1	7
		Paid for Stockings for Jos Emerys Children	0	2	8
	Oct.	Paid for a pear of Brishes for Jos Emery	0	3	0½
1796	Jan.	Paid for 2 shirts for Jos Emery	0	4	6
	Feb.	Paid for inrouling Jos Emery indentures	0	5	0
		Paid for indentures & Filling Up for Jos Emery	1	1	6
		Paid Mr Freake with Jos Emery in part	6	6	0
		Expencis Going to Bine Out Jos Emery	0	4	8
	Mar.	Jos Emery 2 Children 3 weeks at 4s6d pr wk	0	13	6
1796/7		Joseph Emery 12 months at 9s per month	5	8	0

Susannah Cable

			£	s	d
1744		Pd Susannah Cable in her Necessity	0	2	0
		Pd Joseph Merreck for lodging Susannah Cable and her Children	0	3	0
		Pd for tending Susannah Cable	0	6	0
		Pd for 4 Sacks of Cole & fetching for Susan Cable	0	2	10
		Pd for Things when Susannah Cable Lay in	0	3	3½
		Pd Susannah Cables Rent	2	0	0
		Pd Mr. Scamel for Advise about Thos Cables goods	0	3	6
		Pd Ye Constable for coming to Sease Thos Cable	0	2	6

	goods			
	Pd Susannah Cable 14 weeks at 2s pr week and 7 weeks at 3s pr week	2	9	0
1745	Pd Susannah Cable 7 weeks at 3s pr week	1	1	0
	Pd Susannah Cable 48 weeks at 3s pr week	7	4	0
1746	Pd Susannah Cable 50 weeks, 40 at 2s6d & 10 at 3s	6	10	0
	Pd Susannah Cable 55 weeks at 2s6d pr week	0	17	6
1747	Pd Susannah Cable 1 week at 2s6d	0	2	6
	Pd Susannah Cable in her sickness	0	3	6
	Pd Joan Webb for tending her	0	1	1
		and	0	6
			0	16
	Pd the Funerall of Susannah Cable for Bread, Cheese, Liquor, Wool for the Shroud & for ye Coffin, digging ye grave and Ringing ye Bell			8
1749	Pd Jos Merrick for Keeping Cables 3 children 13 weeks	2	12	0
	and for keeping two 39 weeks at 2s8d pr week	5	4	0
	Pd for 4 pairs of Stockings for Cables Children	0	2	7
	and for making 3 Garments & aprons & Strings	0	1	11

There followed 12 other entries up to 1752 for clothing of various kinds for Cable's children and for keeping them.

The Dully Family

The name Dully first appeared in 1799:

			£	s	d
1799	Aug. 16	Gave Betty Dully for redeeming her Clothes from the Pawnbrokers	1	11	6
	Aug. 20	Gave Betty Dully and paying her passage etc to Ireland	1	16	7 ½

She seems to have returned a few years later; her husband was 'examined' in 1813 and given a series of small payments as being in distress. Then followed a long series of similar payments, often at intervals of a few days, to either Jn^o (otherwise Jo^s but presumably the same man) or Betty right up to the end of the records in 1819, always marked 'in distress'. There were also many other payments on their behalf:

			£	s	d
1813	Oct. 14	Pd Jn ^o Skinner for lodging Jno Dully & family	0	6	0
	Oct. 20	Crock for Jos Dully	0	3	3
	Dec. 10	Pd a blankett for Josh Dully	0	4	6
	Dec. 12	Pd Jno Skinner for lodging for Jos Dully & family	0	5	0
1814	Feb. 7	Pd Jno Skinner for lodging for Jos Dully & family	0	8	0
	Feb 8	Pd for a Bedstead Table and Chairs for Jos Dully	1	0	0
	Mar. 15	Mutton for Jos Dully's wife	0	3	0
	Apr. 4	Pd lodging Jos Dully 4 wks	0	4	0
	June 19	Paid for Sope & Washing Betty Dullys Bedclothes	0	1	10
	June 21	Paid for Mutton for Betty Dully	0	3	9
	June 25	Paid for a Blankett & Sheet for Betty Dully	0	9	6
	July 4	Pd Jno Skinner for Lodging Betty Dully & Family	0	8	0
	Aug. 3	Letter from Dully	0	1	3

	Aug. 24	Gave Jno Dully & Family 2 Weeks Pay	0	7	6
	Dec. 10	Paid my expenses going to Bristol to see Dully's Family	0	2	6
1815	Mar. 1	Paid a Woman for looking after Elizabeth Dully	0	10	0
	Mar. 9	Paid my expenses going to Bristol twice to see Eliz th Dully & family	0	4	0
	Mar. 12	Paid for Meat for Eliz Dully	0	3	4
	Mar. 31	Eliz th Dully 1 month @ 8s	0	8	0
		9 months @ 7s	3	3	0
		1 month @ 4s	0	4	0
1816	Mar. 20	Paid for Clothes for Dully children	1	13	0
	Sep. 9	Paid for two pair shoes for Dullys Chn.	0	5	8
	Apr. 3	Paid for a Letter from Scotland	0	1	5
	Apr. 6	Sent to Jos Dully in Scotland	2	0	0
	Apr. 25	Eliz Dully 4 months @ 32s	6	8	0
1817	Mar. 25	Eliz Dully 13 months @ 10s (a week)	26	0	0
	Apr. 14	Pd for a Letter from Scotland		2	1
		Sent to Jos Dully in Distress	2	0	0
	June 29	Pd Jn Merrick for lodging Dully & Family	0	6	0
	July 1	Pd for an Iron Pot for Dullys Family	0	3	0
	Aug. 24	Pd Jno Merrick for lodging Dully & Family 4 weeks	0	6	0
	Sep. 21	Pd Jno Merrick for lodging Jos Dully 4 weeks	0	6	0
	Oct. 19	Pd for lodging Dullys Family	0	6	0
	Oct. 24	Pd for wheels and Axis for Jos Dully	1	17	0
	Nov. 16	Pd for lodging Dullys family	0	6	0
1818	Mar. 25	Pd towards a horse for Dully	2	10	0
		Eliz th Dully 13 months @ 40s a wk	26	0	0
		Josh Dully 35 wks @ 5s a wk	8	15	0
1819	Feb. 22	Josh Dully 25 w @ 5s	3	15	0
	Mar. 25	Eliz Dully 13 month @ 40s a week	26	0	0

One cannot help feeling that the parish behaved very generously towards an apparently rather shiftless family.

John and Ann Day

The story of John and Ann Day is a long a tragic one. Already 'in distress' in 1792 when he was given several sums of a few shillings a week, he and his family received relief continually, in a variety of forms, for more than twenty-five years, largely because of the illness and mental disorder of his wife, Ann. Even after her death in 1808 John was in difficulties over his children, two of whom died. Meanwhile he served as the Schoolmaster, teaching twenty poor children (and one or two private pupils) at the school opened by Hannah More, from 1796 until 1819 or later. For this he received from the Poor Rate no more than £6.10s a year, although he had the use of the Schoolhouse. He earned a few small fees for helping to 'make the rate', presumably because of his ability to read and write better than most, but he must have had a long and despairing struggle to make ends meet, and he was still 'in distress' when accounts ended in 1819.

			£	s	d
1792	May 30	Gave Jo ⁿ Day in Distress	0	4	0
	June 1	Paid for a Bed Bolster Rug Bedsted & Cord & Matt for Jo ⁿ Day	1	10	0

	June 3	Paid for a Sheet Bolster Case & Blankett for Do. (Then follow six payments 'in distress' totalling)	0	11	0
	July 19	Paid Sarah Day for looking after Ann Day and Mending hir Clouths	0	10	0
	"	Paid for Clouthing Ann Day	1	0	11½
	"	Paid Sarah Gale for looking after Ann Day	0	1	0
	"	" James Gale Do	0	1	6
	Sept 8	Paid the Expencc for taking Ann Day to Bethlem Hospittle	16	8	11½
	Oct. 6	Paid for a Strait Weastcoat for Ann Day	0	14	6
1793	Feb. 14	Paid Thos Laspur for looking after Ann Day	0	2	6
	June 8	Paid for a letter from Ann Day	0	0	5
	July 16	Paid for a Bond for Ann Day & Expences at the same time	1	7	10
	Aug. 10	Paid for Clouthing Ann Day	1	8	6
	"	Admittence Incureables	3	10	0
	Aug. 10	Expencc attending the Hospital	0	6	6
1794	Jan. 11	Paid the Hospital Bill Clouthing & Sundry Expences for Ann Day Due this 31 Dec 1793	7	19	7
	"	Paid for sending same to London	0	2	6
1795	Jan. 16	Paid for 2qr 1lb of chees at 7p pr pd	1	13	3
	"	Paid for a Basket & sending the same to London	0	3	4
	"	Expencc at the same time (The cheese may have been a present for the Hospital)	0	3	0
1796	May 25	Paid the Expences for Going to London for Ann Day	20	18	6
1799	Dec. 28	Paid Mr Day for filling up the Indentures for apprenticing Richd. Jones	0	4	0
1802	Aug. 15	Gave John Day at different times	0	18	6
	" 20	Gave John Day in Distress	0	5	0
	" 20	Paid to Women for sitting up with Ann Day	0	4	0
	" 29	Paid for Baby Clothes for Ann Days Child	0	7	8½
	Sept. 6	Paid Sarah Winser for looking after Ann Days Child 3 weeks & half at 3 shillings pr Week	0	10	6
	Sept. 7	Paid Mrs Lewis for looking after John Days Family	0	8	0
	"	Paid Mrs. Burges for making a strait Jacket for Ann Day	1	1	0
	"	Paid Wm Simmons for making a d ^o for d ^o	0	16	7
	"	Paid for Cloathes for Ann Day & Child	0	19	6
	" 13	Paid the Expences going to London with Ann Day	22	0	0
	" 17	Paid for taking Ann Day to Bristol	0	2	0
	" 21	Gave Prudence in Distress	0	1	6
	Oct. 4	Paid Mrs Lewis for looking after Jn ^o Days Family	0	8	0
	Oct. 5	Paid Sarah Gale for looking after d ^o Child for 4 wks	0	12	0
	" 6	Gave Prudence Day in Distress	0	1	0
	" 13	Gave Prudence Day in Distress (4 other such payments to Nov. 7)	0	1	6
	" 29	Paid Sarah Winser 4 Weeks pay for Jn Days Child	0	12	0
	Nov. 29	Paid Mrs Lewis 4 weeks pay for Jn Days Family	0	8	0
	" 29	Paid Counsell Weaver for putting Patience Day to bed	0	5	0
	"	Gave Patience Day in her lying in at different times	1	0	6
	Nov. 29	Gave Patience Day in her distress	0	1	0

	"	Pd Lodging for d ^o	0	2	6
	"	Pd Betty Summerel for looking after d ^o	0	10	0
	Dec. 14	Gave Patience Day when she went home	0	5	0
	" 16	Paid for papers and letters to and from London concerning Ann Day	0	7	0
	" 26	Paid Sarah Winser 4 Weeks pay for Jn Days Child	0	12	0
1803	Jan. 3	Gave Sarah Bryant for Jn Days Child	0	1	0
	Feb. 20	Sarah Winser 4 Weeks pay for Jn Days Child	0	12	0
	Mar. 21	" " for Days Child 4 Weeks	0	12	0
	Mar. 21	Paid Mrs Lewis for 16 weeks for d ^o s children	0	16	0
	Apr. 29	Paid Jn Day for keeping Patience Day	1	2	0
	Aug. 7	Paid Jn Day for his children 2 months	0	8	0
	Sep. 16	Paid Patience Day 20 Weeks at 1s6d per Week	1	10	0
	Nov. 27	Paid Martha Bryant for cloathes for Jn Days young child	0	4	2
1804	Sep. 9	Paid Patience Day 40 Weeks pay at 1s6d a Week	3	0	0
	Oct. 19	Paid the Expences of taking Ann Day to Bristol and for 2 Warrants &c	0	16	6
	" 30	Paid for straight Jackett for Ann Day	0	16	6
1805	Dec. 29	Paid to St Peters Hospital for 20 Weeks keep for Ann Day at 6s per Week	6	0	0
		Gave Nurse the same time	0	2	6
		Expences the same time and a stamp	0	2	6
1806	Feb. 6	Paid for shoes and clothes for Jn Days Child	0	4	0
	Apr. 7	Gave Jn Day in distress	1	0	0
	" 14	Gave Jn Day to Bury his Child	0	10	6
	" 17	For Cloathing Ann Day at the Mint	1	1	0
	June 30	Paid Jn Day for making the Rate	0	5	0
	July 14	Gave Ann Day in the Mint	0	2	0
	Oct. 23	Gave the Nurse at the Mint for Ann Day	0	7	0
	Dec. 31	Gave Jn Day to buy things for his Wife	0	13	9
		Gave Jn Day to buy Victuals	0	1	0
1807	Jan. 1	Gave the Nurse at the Mint	0	2	6
	"	Gave Days Wife	0	1	0
	"	Paid my Expences at Bristol when I went to see if Ann Day was fit to be taken from the mint.	0	2	0
	" 5	Gave the Nurse at the Mint	0	1	0
	" 10	Paid for a shift for Jn Days Wife	0	4	5½
	" 17	Paid for Tea Butter and Sugar for Ann Day	0	2	1
	" 29	Paid for a pair of Shoes for Ann Day	0	5	0
	"	Gave Ann Day	0	5	0
	"	Gave the Nurse	0	2	6
	"	Paid my Expences at Bristol	0	1	11
	Mar. 24	Paid Jn Day for making a Rate	0	5	0
	" 31	Paid for keeping Ann Day in the Hospital at Bristol 46 weeks	14	0	0
	May 22	Paid Jn Day for making a Rate	0	5	0
	July 4	Gave Jn Day in distress	0	10	6
	" 14	Paid my Expences at Bristol when I went about Ann Day	0	3	0
	July 17	Paid Expences when we took Ann Day to Bristol for self, Churchwarden and Jn Day	0	8	0
	" 18	Paid for Certificates to get Ann Day into the Mint	0	9	0

		and Expences the same time for self and Churchwarden			
	"	Gave Jn Day in distress	0	5	0
	Aug. 1	Gave the Nurse at the Mint	0	2	6
	Sept. 7	Gave the Nurse at the Mint	0	5	0
	Oct. 1	Paid for Horse Hire & Cart to take Ann Day to the Mint	0	4	0
1808	Jan. 22	Paid Jn Day for making a Rate	0	5	0
	Apr. 21	Paid Jn Day for making a Rate and entering three in the book	1	0	0
	Jun. 16	Paid Jn Day for making a Rate	0	5	0
	Aug. 1	Gave the Nurse at the Mint for Ann Day	0	1	0
	Aug. 14	Gave Jn Day for his Wifes Burial	1	1	0
1809	Jan. 13	Paid to the Mint for a year and a months Board and for Ann Day Extraordinary Trouble & Stamp	16	17	0
				10	10
Even after his wife's death John Day's troubles continued for he still had his family (at least two children) to care for.					
1810	Sept. 27	Paid Jn ^o Skinner for lodging Jn Day & Family	0	9	0
	Feb. 29	(!) Paid Jn ^o Skinner for lodging Jn Day & Family	1	0	0
1811	Apr. 22	Blankett and Sheet for Jn Day	0	13	3
	June 8	Iron Pot Frying Pan and & Earthern Ware for Jn Day	0	10	3
1812	Aug. 25	Jn Day towards burying his Child	0	7	0
1815	Feb. 27	Paid for Meat for James Day	0	4	1
	Mar. 8	Paid for Jn Day for looking after James Day	1	0	0
	" 19	Paid for Jn Day for looking after James Day	1	0	0
	" 26	Paid for Jn Day for looking after James Day	0	10	0
	Apr. 1	Paid for taking James Day to Doctor Foxs	0	12	0
		Paid for Jn Day for looking after James Day	0	10	0
	May 24	Paid my Expences for going to Doctor Foxs to see James Day	0	2	6
	" 27	Doctor as pr Bill	7	15	6
		Expences fetching James Day Home	0	5	0
	Jun. 10	Paid for Jn Day for looking after James Day	1	0	0
1816	Mar. 23	Paid Jn Day for taking up two vagrants	0	1	0
1817	Oct. 7	Gave Jn Day in distress	0	4	0
	" 12	Gave Jn Day in distress	0	4	0
	Nov. 3	Gave Jn Day in distress	0	2	0
	Dec. 26	Paid Jn Day for making out the Returns for 17 years	1	5	6
1818	Jan. 10	Gave Jn Day in distress	0	1	6

N.B. The twice yearly payments of £3.5s for teaching the 20 poor children have been omitted, but are referred to again in the next chapter.

Bethlem, the London Hospital and the Mint were all hospitals that cared for lunatics. St. Peter's was another name for the Mint which was so called because it was housed in part of the former Mint building in St. Peter's Street in Bristol.

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

CHILDREN

No special provision was made under the Poor Law in Nailsea for the welfare of children until the opening of a Sunday School towards the end of the eighteenth century and a day school for a small number of poor children. There was no children's home or orphanage although living conditions in for the large families of miners and glass-workers deteriorated as these industries grew and "the children...were suffered to run wild in a lamentable state of ignorance and vice" (Rev. Lewis Hart, writing to Hannah More). Homeless children were taken in by neighbours who were paid at a rate of 1s.6d. or 2s.0. a week for doing so. The Accounts show many entries of this kind as well as records of payments for items of clothing, and for mending and washing.

		£	s	d
1745	Pd Hester Manfield for Looking after Browns Children 30 weeks at 2s. pr Week Bob remaining five Weeks longer at 1s. 6d. pr Week (The arithmetic here is difficult to understand!)	4	2	6
1748	Pd Abigail House for her Bastard Child 50 weeks at 9d a week Pd Thos Heale for Keeping his Grand Child 50 weekes at 1s. 2d.	1	17	6
1795	Pd Mary Shenton for Make and Mending for J ^{os} Emerys Children	2	8	4
		0	1	7

SCHOOLS

The first proposal for the establishment of a school came from Miss Hannah More and her sister, although there are entries in the Accounts showing that some kind of 'schooling' had already begun in a small way

		£	s	d
1768 July 4	Pd Newtons Childs Schooling	0	2	0
1769 June 13	Pd for Newtons Maids Schooling	0	2	6
1787 April 5	Pd James King for Teaching the Poor Children 2 Quarters	2	10	0

James King had been appointed in 1784 to teach 12 children to read and write, and he continued to be paid from the Poor Rate for this service until 1790. When a stable was built in 1788 for the use of the Church (i.e. for the Rector of Wraxall when he came to visit his church in Nailsea) a Vestry room was built over it, and this room was probably used for the children.

At about this time the Misses More came to Nailsea and found it "abounding in sin and wickedness". Miss Martha More wrote in her journal that when they met the heads of the parish, "They were uncommonly struck and delighted at our coming, and not having a house suited to our purpose called a parish meeting and proposed even to build one rather than lose us."

The foundation stone for a school house was laid, with due ceremony, on September 30th 1791 and the More sisters came to Nailsea in February 1792 to open the school. It is not clear, however, whether the term 'school' referred to a Sunday School or a day school for teaching reading, writing and arithmetic, or both. It would appear that the room over the stable continued to be used, perhaps for the Sunday School, and the day school may have been established in part of the Tithe Barn (which is still used as part of the Hannah More Primary School).

The school house was built on a piece of land given by Mrs. Baddily (wife of the owner of the Tanyard at King's Hill) "adjoining to the School already built". This may be a reference to the stable room (about a hundred yards distance) or to a schoolroom in the tithe barn, for the 'school house' was the cottage now known as "Glebe Cottage" which adjoins the Tithe Barn. Glebe Cottage continued to be occupied by the village school master until well into the present century.

The cost of building the school house was borne by Mrs. Baddily and rent was paid from the Poor Rate for a year or two. (There is no record of what happened after that.)

		£	s	d
1793 June 24	Paid for the School hous up to the 25 th . Of March last 1793	6	10	0
1794 May 3	Paid One Years Rent for the School House due the 25th March 1794	6	10	0
1794 Nov 2	Paid Half a Years Rent for the School House due at Michaelmas 1794	3	5	0

Mr. and Mrs. Younge of Bath were engaged to instruct the children at a salary of £30 a year, plus the cottage. They stayed for only a few years, and John Day took charge in 1796. He was paid from the Poor Rate at a much smaller salary but he continued as the school master for 25 years or more.

		£	s	d
1796 Mar. 26	Paid John Day for Teaching 20 Poor Children 1 Qr.	1	12	6
1796 Oct. 20	Paid Mr. Day for two Quarters Schooling for 20 Porr C	3	5	0
1797 Jan. 4	Paid Mr. Day for Schooling	3	5	0
Oct. 9	Paid John Day for half a year Schooling for 20 Poor Children	3	5	0
1798 Oct. 15	Jno. Day as per Bill	3	5	0

Similar payments were recorded right up to the end of the Accounts in 1819. With such a small salary it is no wonder that John Day was continually in distress, especially as his wife was a great burden to him (see previous chapter). He made a few extra shillings by 'keeping the Rate' but he also seems to have had some private pupils:

		£	s	d
1797 Jan. 4	Paid Mr. Day for Schooling for Wm Hix	0	9	0
Oct.t 9	Paid John Day for 26 Weeks Schooling for Wm Hix	0	13	0
1798 Apr. 8	Paid John Day for 23 W Schooling for Wm Hix	0	12	0

From 1797 to 1801 payments were also made from the Poor Rate for schooling for 'J^{os} Tippett' Child' at the rate of 3d. a week. No reason was given as to why these two children should have been given schooling in addition to the 20 poor children, but in one of her letters Hannah More wrote "Not the very poor only are deplorably ignorant. The common farmers are as illiterate as their workmen." She directed the school masters to take farmers' sons on weekdays at a low price to be paid by them. There seems to have been a very poor response from the Nailsea famers!

FOOD AND CLOTHING

Gifts to the needy poor were often in the form of food or clothing. The most frequently mentioned items of food were bread (1s. a dozen loaves in 1726), cheese (2d. a pound), butter (6d. a pound), pease (4d a quartern, i.e. ¼ stone) and potatoes. Rarely mentioned were beef (19 pound for 2s.), bacon, neck of mutton, wheat, barley, brandy and cider. Gin was given several times during the period of the Accounts, on one occasion as par to what must have been a celebration of some importance:

		£	s	d
June 13	Paid for Gin Mutton & Cake for Ann Barrow	0	7	6

When food was given it was often in large portions, e.g. a quartern of pease and the 19 lbs. of beef, intended, no doubt, to last for some time. Brandy and gin were given by the pint or quart and cider by the small barrel. Beer was only mentioned as part of the meal provided after a burial (usually bread, cheese and beer).

Articles of clothing paid out of the Poor Rate included shoes, stockings, breeches, hats, caps, neckcloths, waistcoats, bodices, 'stomagers', mops, shifts, gowns, quaifes and aprons. Materials were sometimes provided for clothing to be made, Irish cloth or lining (linen), dowlas (calico), Hessian, flaxen and flannel, together with the necessary buttons and thread. Whalebone was once mentioned.

It is difficult to always distinguish between male and female clothing, but clothing intended for children was usually described as such. For example, an entry during 1711 reads:

	£	s	d
12 yds of Cloth for ye 4 children of Ann Webb	0	13	0
4 paire of stockings	0	2	2
6 Ells of Linen Cloth at 10d. p Ell	0	5	0
½ an Ell for caps	0	0	7
For Whale bone	0	0	10½
4 ounces of Thread	0	0	7
3 dozzen of Buttons	0	0	6¼
3 hats	0	3	9
Pd for Cloth to make ye letters on their Sleeves	0	0	2

The letters may have been to identify the children as paupers, for a rule was made about this time that all paupers in receipt of relief from public funds should be identified by badges on their outer garments:

		£	s	d
1713	Pd Sarah Gay for putting the bag (badge) upon the poor peoples clothes	0	2	4

This obnoxious custom was soon abolished.

Occasionally, articles of furniture were given including sheets, blankets, bolster cases, bedsteads, bed cord, a "mill-puff for a bed", iron pots, tables, chairs, platters, frying-pans, coal, grate-bars, tongs, earthen-ware, and a night-stool.

ILLNESS AND TREATMENT

Some of the 'distress' so frequently mentioned in the Accounts was due, no doubt, to ill health of one kind or another; but the only disease specifically referred to by name was smallpox:

		£	s	d
1712	Gave Doris Winsor when she was sick of ye small pox	0	2	6

But a wide variety of other health troubles were considered to be deserving of relief, e.g. :

		£	s	d
1712	Pd Abigail Godwin for Ale to make Nick Rogers diet drink	0	0	8
1721	Pd John Pulling for Curing Goodmans boys Scruff head	1	0	0
1724	Pd Mary Porter for Curing Betty Williams hand	0	5	0
1729	Pd Mary Moore for Dressing Joseph Sharpes feet	0	10	0
1808	Pd for Cordiac confection and salve	0	1	2
1808	Pd for a yard of calico for plasters	0	0	8
1812	Pd for Castor oil	0	1	0
	A curious entry was:			
1794	Pd Wm Reed for Occulting 24 Children	3	12	0

The word "occulting" is rather obscure. Could it possibly have been an early use of inoculation against smallpox? Edward Jenner was experimenting in nearby Gloucestershire at this time prior to his publishing of his results in 1798: it is unlikely that a Poor Law Overseerer would have been familiar with the word 'inoculation' but 'occulting' might possibly have been the nearest he could get to a word that he had heard spoken.

Alternatively, 'occulting' may have referred to some form of black magic. A few years later there is an entry:

		£	s	d
1817	Pd Wm Hollifield for Curing George Cranes Child of the Evil	1	1	0

But we can only make a guess as to whether 'the Evil' was of the body or the spirit.

Another strange case was the payment in 1707 "for ye care of James Hancoxs Broken Belly" by "the viper woman".

The services of a doctor resident in the village were frequently mentioned. In the earlier years his charges seemed to vary considerably, although we are rarely given any indication of the nature of the illness or the kind of treatment given:

		£	s	d
1724	Paid Doctor Hinks his Bill for Medicines and attendance to Deborah Bayly	0	4	6
1735	Paid ye Doctor Hinkes his bill for Ed Loscombe	6	0	0
1692	Pd doctor Trustone for 30 times coming and medicans	4	8	3

However, a regular annual fee was agreed with the doctor in 1736:-

"It was then agreed on between the Chife inhabitece of ye parish of naylsey of e one parte and Wm Hinkes of ye other part Surgion and ye Chife Inhabitece have

agreed wth ye s^d Hinkes to give three Guinas to attend all ye poore Inhabitece of ye parish y^t are chargabel or shall be Chargable on ye poor boock – and find them for various medicines and Visits as often as occation shal Requer as Wittness our hands for ye were insuing....”

In spite of the curious wording and spelling it is clear that this was the beginning of a panel system in Nailsea.

BURIALS

The cost of burying the dead of poor families was often, perhaps always, met by the Overseer from the Poor Rate. No mention was made of any religious ceremony of fee for the parson, but the costs of digging a grave, of providing a woollen shroud and a coffin, of ringing the church bells and especially of providing ‘victuals and drinkables’, usually bread, cheese and beer, were all paid by the Overseer.

		£	s	d
1701	Pd for a coffin for Mary Cole	0	6	0
	Pd for wool to put about her	0	1	8
	Pd for making ye grave and ringing	0	1	6
	Pd for bred Cheese and beare at buring of Mary Cole	0	5	8
1702	Pd for bread Cheese beare and Tobacco at John Cole buriel	0	5	11

When Mary Cole was buried the ‘King’s Duty’ of 4s. was paid, and for John Cole a ‘sirtivecate’ costing (?); and after the funeral 2s. was spent “When wee sold John Coles goods”.

At this time when the wool trade was bringing prosperity to the whole country it was forbidden to use any other material, such as linen, for a shroud, with a fine for those caught doing so.

There seems to have been some doubt when Ann Pinching was buried:

		£	s	d
17	Paid gartery gening for goeing to ye Justices to make affida ^{tt} y ^t Ann Pinching was buried in wooling	0	0	6
	Ed. Beackes had been fined for breaking this law:			
1682	Rece’d of Ed Beackes for buring thoses parsons in Lining	2	10	0

THE POOR HOUSE

In 1682 Thomas Gay was paid the sum of £35 “for building ye almshouse” there are several entries showing payments for its upkeep and repair. (It is clear from the entries that the “Almshouse” and the “Poor House” were the same building.)

		£	s	d
1705	Paid ye thecher for Thetching ye Alms House 4 days and half a day & a boy to tend him	0	8	9
1707	Paid John Bayley for too dozen of helme for ye Almshouse	0	8	8
1707	Paid Rope yearne Spars & Strachers	0	3	4
1743	Sweeping the Almshouse Chimneys	0	1	0
1768	Pd Wm Pope for thatching ye Poor House	0	9	4
	Pd half a hundred of Nails	0	0	6

	Pd Mr Bullock for 4 Sheaves of helme and a quarter of hafts	0	3	6
	Paid John Cambridge Glazier for Glazing Work done at the Poor House	0	7	2
1799	Paid for a New Casement for the Poor House	0	3	3
1808	Paid Jas Mansfield for a quarter thousand tiles... to put on the Poor House	0	5	0

Although the Poor House was the property of the parish a Chief Rent was paid to the owner of the land, at first literally a "peppercorn rent".

		£	s	d
1685	Pay for thee pounds of piper for Lords rent	0	4	3
1720	Paid for 2 pounds of Pepper to ye Rent for the Alms House	0	5	10
1768	Pd Mr. Powell in Lue of a Pound of Pepper for the Annuity of the Poor House	0	1	6
1794	Paid the Lords Rent for the Poor House	0	6	0

The Poor House was closed in 1839 following the setting up of Workhouses under the Poor Law of 1834. It was sold for use as a cottage in 1871.

A second Poor House, was needed in about 1800 when an outbuilding attached to Yew Cottage in Back Lane was taken into use. It was referred to in an entry of 1804:

		£	s	d
	Paid Betty Gale towards building an Oven in the New Poor House	0	12	0

LAW AND ORDER

There are many references in the Overseers' Accounts to legal matters of one sort or another, as it was frequently necessary for them to make applications to Justices of the Peace and to visit Courts or Sessions with their 'clients'. Reasons varied from simple attestations and the settling of minor points of law to serious matters involving public order and disorder.

		£	s	d
1697	Pd for the Orders to carry Susan Pinching to Wraxall & Expences in goeing before the Justice	0	6	0
1698	Pd the Charge Evilchester Seasions and Orders for Carrying Susan Pinching to Tickenham	2	2	0
1707	Pd for appearing to Answer ye Complaint of a warrant in ye behalfe of ye p'ish	0	0	6
1707	Pd for going to have Mary March Sorne	0	1	0
1710	Pd for Signing the Rate and a Warrant of Disturbance and Examination of John Brown and Spent at the Petty Sessions att Bedmintser	0	7	9
1712	Pd for our Nailzea men thrie expence s in Carrying James Keder to prison	1	2	5
1712	Pd two men y ^t toke James Keder to goe to prison w th him	0	10	0
	Pd for the horses ye 2 men rod & ye horse y ^t Keder rode	0	15	0
	Pd ye expences at ye same time at Wrington	1	0	0
	Ralph Vigars Expences in Carrying James Keder to prison	2	5	1
	Pd to Zach Holifield for going to Jayle w th James Keder	0	6	0

	Pd Robt Shart for ye same	0	6	0
	Pd Sam Scudemore for ye same	0	6	0
1722	Gave a Lawyer for Peruseing of Act concerning John Youngs Parish	0	1	0
	Spent at fayland at 2 Severall times at y Petty Sessions	0	2	0
	Pd for ye hire of a horse to carry Sapience Godwin to Swear to her Parish & her Oath	0	2	0
1747	Pd Mr Hardy for Eatables & Drinkables for 10 people Horses Hay & Corn when stood tryall with East Harptree	7	6	0
1748	Pd Mr. Beakes 10s. being supined and attended ye sessions and 5s. allowed towards a sadle being lost.			
1806	Paid for Liquor for the Constables when the Rioting was	0	3	5
1807	Paid the Tithing Mens Expences at Failand when they appeared against the Riotters	0	9	2
	Paid for keeping the horses	0	1	0

The above entries have been reproduced exactly as they appear in the Accounts with the spelling and wording as used. Some of them are rather difficult to understand but certainly there are many intriguing stories behind them. On the whole, however, Nailsea would seem to have been a less disorderly village than we might expect from the description by Hannah More. It had its whipping post and stocks but there are few references to them:

		£	s	d
1700	Pd to William Parsons for ye Whiping post	0	5	0
	Pd to George Skidmore for Eiregare (Iron gear) for ye Whiping post	0	2	6
1716	Pd for an order to whip Thomas Godwin	0	2	6
	Pd for expences at ye same time	0	1	8
1716	Pd John Tucker for entertaining thous that lookt after too vagrants till they could be whipt	0	3	2
1737	Paid Thomas Bryant for ye Lock & Irongere for ye Stocks. Weigh 7½ lb at 4d a lb	0	2	6
	Whipping was also necessary to keep the church clear of dogs:			
1716	Pd Doctor Lovell for a Whip for the Church	0	0	2
	Pd Doctor Lovell for whipping ye dogs at Church	0	1	9
	('Doctor Lovell' was a pauper who was being paid at the rate of 1s.6d. a week at this time.)			

THE CHURCH

When the first disbursements were made the Rector, as one of the leading figures in the parish (although he was actually Rector of Wraxall to which Nailsea was then attached), was much involved. At first the Overseers worked in close co-operation with the Churchwardens who were appointed at the same Vestry Meeting; and, no doubt, the Rector had considerable influence over the selection of both and in directing them in their duties. On more than one occasion the Rector signed the Overseers' annual Accounts himself instead of allowing them to be scrutinised by the Vestry and the local Justices.

Whether or not the Rector was using undue influence, the fact remains that for some years around the end of the 17th century the Poor Rate was used to defray expenses involved in maintaining the structure of the church and even for the conduct of the services. It was all done quite openly, as the following details show:-

		£	s	d
1696	Pd Work about the poarch & Tower Pd laets & pins for ye s ^d work Pd for Nailes Pd for Tyle and haling the Same Pd for haire & Lyme & Carriage			
1697	Pd for mending leaves in the Church & the poarch & for Timbr Pd to Rich Brymbe for playstereing white liming & coullering the Church To Robert Tovey for Glaseing the Window and sowdering the ledde of the Church Pd to James Hix for Cleaning the Church Pd for one sack of Coale for the Church Pd for bread and wine for two Communiones Pd for Oyl for the Bells	2	0	0
		2	5	4
		0	1	6
		0	0	8
		0	5	2
		0	6	0
1711	Pd John Little for 13 ells and 3 quarters of fine Holland for a Surplice and a Communion Table Cloth Pd for making it	3	14	5¾
		0	11	0

HIGHWAYS

"In 1682 There was a rate made for the repairing of high waies within our p'ish by the waywardens above named which comes to £5 6s 11½

This rate was levied quite independently of the Poor Rate but in the early years, i.e. up to about 1750, payments were often made from the Poor Rate for ditches, bridges and the repair of roads:

		£	s	d
1682	Paid Thomas Tucker for a new ditch Paid towards a bridge at Chewmagna Paid towards two bridges pensford & woolard	0	8	0
		0	11	11
		0	10	0
1697	Pd Stones for mending the heighwayes	0	3	0
1704	Pd for the Stile and the Wall Pd for Halleing and Setting up Pd John Phillips for 13 Weekes Keeping the Water to run after Nailseys Ditch	1	0	6
		0	2	0
		1	4	0
1708	Paid Ralph Vigar... for Part of ye Beam for Tickenham Ditch at mo rind (Moor End)	0	4	2

And later there is an "Acc^t of the Charge of Building the 2 Bridges going into the Moore beginning in October 1733":

		£	s	d
	P ^d Ab: Roach for 3 Load of stones And for halling of y ^e 3 Load from Kings Hill P ^d Hugh Grinfield for 1 Load & 3 of Lime and for Halling it – viz 1 Load from Tickenham and 2 from Clevedon	0	1	0
		0	4	6
		0	7	6
		0	4	6
	Pd Mr Combs for 25 Load of stones two of w ^{ch} was pennant And for Halling them	0	12	6
		1	17	6
	Paid John Vinson for 8 Load of pennant stones And for 1 Load of Large stones	0	16	0
		0	0	6

And for Halling the 9 Load	0	1	6
Paid Vinphry Calcott for 3 Load of Lime	0	15	0
And for halling y ^e 3 Load	0	7	6
Paid Richard Price for 5 Load of Large Stones	0	4	6
And for the halling them from the heath	0	7	6
Paid Mr. Barber for 1 Load of Large Stones	0	1	0
And for Halling them	0	1	6
For halling 5 Load of Gravill	0	5	0
For halling of Mortar Earth and Cleaning away the Earth from both bridges	0	5	0
Paid Ed Westlake for Building the 2 Bridges	4	0	0
And gave him to drink to Each Bridge 2 ^s 6 ^d	0	5	0
(Total)	10	17	6

APPRENCESHIPS ETC.

It was one of the regular duties of the Overseers to arrange apprenticeships for children in their care, the boys going into a trade or to work on an estate, and the girls going into service.

		£	s	d
1795	Pd for Indents for James Jones and filing up	1	7	6
	Expencc at the same time	0	2	9
1800	Paid Thos Westcott in part of £10 for Rich ^d Jones as an Apprentice	5	0	0
	Paid for enrolling the Indentures	0	5	0

An earlier entry shows that an Overseer could get into trouble for failing in this duty;

		£	s	d
1707	Paid for a Warrant for John Bayly for not taking James Hancox being bound Prentice to ye Estate of ye Lady Nevill & for expences going to ye Sitting at Bedminster	0	3	0

During the period of the Napoleonic Wars, the early years of the 19th century boys were encouraged to join the Militia by a generous grant of £5 or even £10, taken from the Poor Rate. This may have been the only fund on which the parish could draw for such a purpose, and for contributions towards village celebrations such as:

		£	s	d
1702	Pd for directions to pray for ye Queen (i.e. Queen Anne)	0	1	0
	Paid for a proclimation	0	1	0
1704	Pd Spent the 5 day of November	0	5	0

VERMIN

It seems that all wild, other than those used for food, were undesirable vermin and rewards were given to those who killed them.

		£	s	d
1697	Pd Capt Pigotts man for killing a Badgger	0	1	0
1701	Pd 2 hedgehogs ... and 2, 5, 6 and 2 hedgehogs at 2s each			
1701	Pd Edmund Twit famally for 39 hedgehogs	0	6	6

1701	Pd ye hed of an oter	0	1	0
1692	Pd Robert Brown for Kiling 6 Poul Cats	0	2	0
1692	Pd James Hicks Son too poolcates	0	0	8
1729	Pd James Baker for ketching ye Moles on ye footwall	0	5	6

Some of the numbers of animals killed suggest that some men and boys made a practice of hunting vermin to earn a little extra money.

The catching of birds may have been for their value as food.

CONCLUSION

References to Nailsea by Hannah More and her sister at the end of the eighteenth century suggest that the village, like other mining communities in North Somerset, was in a state of wild disorder and depravity but there is little evidence in the Overseers' Accounts to support such allegations. There are one or two references to the stocks and a whipping post but little to suggest that they were often used. Occasional malefactors had to be taken to court or to prison but such incidents, which were recorded because the expenses involved came from the Poor Rate, were rare in relation to the size of the population; and the phrase "when the Riots were", used in 186, indicates only that such an event was quite exceptional.

The evidence of the Accounts is piecemeal and incomplete, of course, but a clear picture emerges of a well intended and consistent endeavour to meet the most urgent needs of the poorer members of the community by taxing the more fortunate property owners under the rather primitive administration of village officials appointed for the purpose. With no other funds available the Poor Rate gradually became a heavy burden on the property owners as this quite rural village, consisting mainly of scattered farms, became dominated by coal-mining and glass-working industries (which appear to have made no direct contribution to the Poor Rate). It must have come as a great relief to them when the whole system was re-organised in 1834.