

Title: The relief of the poor in Walton-on-Thames under the Vestry and the Board of Guardians 1800-1850 : a comparison

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Abstract:

After a journey of 18 miles from London, a traveller passing through the Parish of Walton-on-Thames in Surrey in 1801, would have found himself in a fairly large parish of 6,859 acres, where the chief arable crops were barley, oats, wheat and rye. He would have discovered that the Parish of 1,476 inhabitants was bordered in the north by the River Thames and in the East by the River Mole, and that a considerable area of the Parish, about 3,000 acres, was common pasture and common land. His counterpart, fifty years later, would have seen a rather different picture. The population of Walton by 1851 had nearly doubled to 2,881, a National school has been set up, and the 1840s had seen the arrival of the railway in the Parish. The Walton Enclosure Act in 1804 had brought with it great changes in the distribution of land, and the landscape of the Parish. The Enclosures, however, were not brought in without opposition. At a Vestry meeting on November 7th 1799, of about forty inhabitants, a petition was addressed to the "nobility and gentry", who resided in the Parish, expressing the hope that the latter would not "promote any scheme imperious to the inferior orders of the people, and especially to those from whom the labours and benefits of husbandry are to be looked for". The petition was to go first to H.R.H. The Duke of York. The protest, however, was in vain for the Enclosures were carried out in 1804. New roads were laid down bordered by newly-planted oak trees. Some of the major landowners bought large areas of land to add to their estates and in this way the Parish became transformed. The Kemeys-Tyntes of the Burhill Estate, Sir Henry Fletcher Bart. of Ashley Park, Sir John Frederick Bart. of Burwood Park, Col. Alcock of Burwood House and the Earl of Carhampton of the Painshill Estate all enlarged their estates, and Edward Peppin formed the new estate of Walton Lodge with his purchases. All but the first of these landowners attended the Parish Vestry at some time. The Earl of Tankerville of the Mount Felix Estate also attended at times, and the Duke of York too send his proxy on one or two occasions. The old Church of St. Mary's, parts of which dated back as far as the Domesday Survey, was the Parish Church for the areas of Walton, Oatlands and Hersham until 1850. After this date the latter areas formed two separate parishes. However, in 1830, a Chapel of Ease was built in Hersham, spurred on by the growing interest in non-conformity in this part of the Parish. The first Methodist Church was erected in 1845, promoted by a Walton grocer and ironmonger, Joseph Steele, who will be mentioned again in the following chapters. The period chosen, 1800 to 1850, therefore, was one of the many changes in the landscape and environment of the Parish. It was also one of social change, in which the administration of the Poor Law was transferred from the Walton Vestry to the Chertsey Board of Guardians after the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. This dissertation will compare the new with the old system at the local level, and discuss the criticisms and opinions of contemporaries, and later historians, about the effect of the Act on Poor Law administration, and on the treatment of the Poor themselves.