

The Warblington Poor Man's Friend Society

Paternalism in early Victorian Emsworth

The labouring population of Warblington parish were fortunate to have a rector who not only lived locally but was acutely aware of the needs of his poorer parishioners. William Norris, of the famous Norris family, succeeded his father, on his own petition, to the rectory at Warblington in 1827.

In 1830 the national Labourers' Friend Society had been started to better the conditions of the labouring classes, with particular emphasis on allotting small portions of land, large enough to support the family but not too large to interfere with ordinary employment. Perhaps some local farmers and small shopkeepers shared the misgivings, expressed in newspapers, that greater self sufficiency would make the labouring classes too independent and neglect their employers' business.

William Norris did not share this scepticism, however, and focused on the potential benefits of improvements in morale, self esteem and comforts for the family; furthermore, he argued that allotments would create a shared interest with local land owners, some of whose Property had been attacked in the 'Swing riots' in 1830. He was mindful of the harsh impact of the New Poor Law on the labouring workforce in the area.

He successfully persuaded local landowners and the 'middling classes' to subscribe to the Society, whose income was used to lease some land and to offer loans to help tenants get started. I am grateful for the help of Roy Morgan who identified the site of these allotments to the west of the Horndean Road, above today's recreation ground.

Although the records of the Warblington Society did not survive, its activities were faithfully reported in the *Hampshire Telegraph*.

The Society was started on 5th December 1836 and held its first anniversary meeting in the National School room on December 7th. Its treasurer, Ralph Clarke, writing from Flint Cottage, notified readers that the first year had proved to be a complete success. 28 tenants, who included jobbing bricklayers and agricultural labourers, occupied plots in an area of 6 to 7 acres. They had a waiting list of twelve, and only two 'delinquents' were ejected, their vacancies immediately being filled.

At the second meeting in December 1838, chaired by the Revd W Norris, it was reported that the Society had acquired more land from Mr Fenwick, and now covered 15 customary acres, divided into 87 plots and employing 74 people. Loans of between 2s. to 7s. to thirteen people, to acquire seed or small tools, had been repaid and no rents were in arrears; the Society had funds of £18.18s. to meet expenses in 1839.

The Society continued to flourish and, although 20 tenants had vacated their allotments due to death, moving away or resignation, only 1¹/₄ acres were not occupied and there were applications in hand for these. Only one tenant had been ejected for misconduct; tenants were increasingly confident in their ability to repay loans, and sums of between 2s. 6d. and £2.12s.6d. were lent to twenty-five individuals. Revd Norris reminded his audience in the National School room that the Bedding, Clothing and Firing Association Society had become incorporated with them. A penny subscription fund had been carried on in the parish for some years and the number of depositors totalled 103 with £20 collected. It was reported that since the amalgamation, 11 months earlier, the number of depositors had increased to 204, and upwards of £100 had been collected. A bonus of 25%, raised by a voluntary subscription among the gentry and others, was added to 'encourage still further these most desirable habits of foresight, prudence and industry'. The chairman praised the 'unwearied and benevolent efforts of the lady collectors, Misses Norris, Knight, Whicher and Hicks'.

In the following year a well was sunk in each field, drainage improved and it was agreed that in 1841 the tenants would be provided with two rollers, two harrows and two carts to transport

manure and produce. To encourage good husbandry, eight prizes were awarded for the best cultivated plots. The winners in 1841 were Thomas Tickner, William Messum, George Newell, 10s. each; George Austen and Anthony Lambert, 7s.6d. each, and 5s. each to Thomas Pollen, Arthur Farndell, sen. and Charles Redman. By 1844, the Society could report at the annual meeting that, apart from £1.6s.6¹/₂d., all rents and loans had been fully paid and the treasurer held £26.19s.9¹/₂d. That year, the allotments had been judged by Capt. Allen of Prinsted and William Shean of Lumley. Prize winners were named as Joseph Martin, William Badger, James Woodman, 10s. each; Charles Parlett, Anthony Lambourne, 7s.6d. each; Richard White, William Newell and George Pharoah, aged 79, 5s. each.

Rev. Norris told the audience that the Society was proposing to apprentice out annually two boys and two girls, children of deserving allotment holders, at some time in the future; this was an optimistic note for later development.

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