

## Prize Winning Agricultural Labourers 1837 – 1857

There is very little documentary evidence, apart from church registers, about the lives of individuals in the rural workforce in the early Victorian era. It is thanks to a man named Charles Osborn that we know a little bit more about some of the farm labourers in the parish of Warblington. They were given the opportunity to increase their sparse incomes when the South East Hants Association was formed in 1836.

This Fareham-based society was formed by Charles Osborn of Manor Farm, Hayling, with the support of Henry Delme of Cams. They recruited a number of prominent landowners who became vice-presidents thereby creating a respectable image and increasing local support. The object of the society was to reward workers not only for their skills but more importantly for thrift, self-sufficiency, respectability and responsible behaviour. Farmers and landowners were still much aware of the arson attacks which had occurred in southern England in recent years; the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 had done nothing to reverse the misfortunes of farm workers, who would be heavily penalised for not being employed.

The Association was financed by annual subscriptions from farmers and landowners who were then able to put forward the names of worthy candidates in the various classes of the annual competition. However the candidates had to meet certain criteria. These were listed on a certificate and included regular attendance at church or chapel, non-attendance in beershops or public houses and that their general conduct made them worthy of reward. The paper, which was used as an entry form, had to be signed by the employer, church minister, churchwarden and overseer or four respectable house holders.

The society had a wide catchment area. Initially covering the Fareham, Droxford, Catherington and Havant Poor Law Unions, its size was later increased by adding the parishes of Buriton and West Meon. It was able to muster a lot of support from local farmers who shared the founders' ideals of improving self-esteem and productivity by rewarding the best of the labour force, whilst encouraging others to improve their performance.

It was due to Osborn's insistence that personal details of prize winners were published in the *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* that I am able to provide the following information.

CLASS: For Labourers who have brought up the largest families respectably, with the smallest amount of parochial relief:

1838: £ 1 **Anthony Lambert**, aged 45, of Warblington, in the employ of **Mr George Hellyer**, for having brought up 5 children with only 7/6d. relief, although

he has been put to considerable expense by the sickness and death of 5 children and two wives.

1844: £1 **Thomas Tickner**, aged 34, of Warblington, in the employ of **Mr John Hale**. for having supported 5 children without parish relief. Candidate belongs to a benefit society.

£1 **Samuel Newell**, aged 41, of Warblington, in the employ of **Mr John Goodson**, for having supported 9 children for some years, without parish relief except during his wife's confinements.

£1 **David Owten**, aged 34, of Warblington, in the employ of **Mr John Goodson**, for having supported 7 children without parochial relief, except during sickness.

CLASS: Labourers under 50 years of age, who have since the year 1840 brought up their families respectably with the smallest amount of parochial relief.

1851: £1 **David Outen** (sic), aged 42 of Warblington, in the employ of **Mr H Scott**, for having supported 6 children with very little relief.

CLASS: For widows, who have supported, since 1826, the largest families respectably, with the smallest amount of parochial relief.

1<sup>st</sup> - £3 **Hannah Beattie**, aged 36, of Warblington for having supported 5 children since her husband died in 1835, without parish relief.

CLASS: Labourers who placed out in respectable service their sons at an early age, all of whom bear good characters.

1844 £2 **George Farren**, aged 49 of Warblington, in the employ of **Mr John Barton** for having placed out 5 sons at early ages.

CLASS: Labourers or widows, who have placed out at respectable service, their daughters at an early age, and who have remained in service with good characters.

1852 £2 **Samuel Newell**, aged 48 of Warblington, in the employ of **Mr R M Gill**, for having placed out at service 4 daughters, all of whom have kept their placed with good characters, and one is now a school mistress.

CLASS: Labourers or widows whose families shall have made by their own industry the greatest improvement in their condition of life.

1855 £1. 10s. **Samuel Newell**, aged 50 of Warblington, in the employ of **Mr R M Gill**, who has brought up a large family respectably, two sons are apprenticed, and one daughter is Mistress of Red Hill School.

Far and away the biggest class of recipients, receiving sums between 15s. and £2, were those 'cottagers resident in the Havant Union whose cottage and gardens, consisting of not more than half an acre shall be kept and cultivated in the neatest manner, and the general appearance of whose crop, making due allowance for the natural quality of the soil and size, and also shall be most satisfactory to the Judges appointed to view them. No candidate shall be eligible for these Premiums who have kept their Daughters from Domestic Service after they have attained the age and strength for such employment'.

Prizes donated by the Bishop of Winchester to agricultural labourers, above fifty years of age, who produced the best certificates of character, regard being had more especially to their regularity of attendance at church, and at the holy sacrament.

1842 3<sup>rd</sup> – a large Prayer Book – **Sarah Newland**, aged 78

1850 – A Bible and prayer book – **George Bolton**, aged 75.

The prize money may not seem much by today's values (10s. = 50p) but local wages in those days were between 8s. (40p) and 9s. (45p) and therefore the lowest award was equal to a week's money. The awards were given out at an annual dinner held during October in the "Red Lion" hotel at Fareham. This was a big occasion. Over a hundred male prize winners (women were excluded but were given half a crown (12<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>p) in lieu) plus up to a hundred subscribers and clergy received a substantial meal after the ploughing events had taken place in the morning. As the winners were called forward they received commemorative tablets as well as money; these were often displayed as family heirlooms on the walls of cottages.

Over the years the original supporters had mostly died or moved away. Twenty years after its start, the society was faced with falling income and tried a number of innovations but with the death of the secretary on 27 January 1863, the Association folded in the following year. Osborn's name is still remembered in Fareham where he had a large farm, now the site of the Civic Offices and shopping mall.

*Malcolm Walford*