

Parish Row - Shrivenham

An Act of Parliament of 1834 set up the Poor Law Unions, in which the government grouped together each civil parish into a Union of Parishes. There were approximately 600 Unions throughout England, each one comprising around 20 or more parishes. The idea of the Union was to prevent destitution among the poor and those people who were on the verge of that unhappy situation were sent to the Workhouse, sometimes known as, '*The Institution.*' There was a large one in Faringdon and the Union covered all the parishes around the Faringdon area, including Shrivenham, Watchfield, Longcott, Bourton, Ashbury & many others. However, the real problem was one of attitude; about how the landed gentry considered and treated their workforces. Henry Tucker of Bourton was a landowner, landlord and successful businessman, but he was a rarity in that he cared about his agricultural labourers, and he was wealthy enough to make a big difference. It's not a surprise therefore to learn that it was he who addressed a large gathering of landowners and farmers at a dinner in Faringdon in 1860. Below is a newspaper article concerning his speech.

From the newspaper Essex Standard dated Friday 28th December 1860

Overcrowded cottages statement made at the dinner of the Faringdon agricultural library
on the 22nd November 1860.

Two years ago I read for the Friends of the Faringdon agricultural library a paper on the condition of the agricultural labourer, in which I drew attention to the vast efforts that have been made for the advancement of Agriculture in all its departments, and endeavour to show that everything which science or art could devise or many command, has been made contributory to this object and that not merely an improvement proving methods of cultivating the soil and the introduction of new and improved implements and machinery, but also in the breeding, feeding and housing of cattle in dry clean, well ventilated buildings; at the same time I pointed out the fact that while all these gigantic efforts were called forth in that direction, comparatively little has been done to the improvement and

well-being of the labourer, and specially as regards to the accommodation. These observations, I believe are just as true now as they were two years since and, feeling a deep interest in the question, I have employed competent persons to visit every town and village in the Faringdon Union to ascertain exact information as to the accommodation and the inmates in every cottage in the Union. That information I have in my hand, but as it is, circumstantial and voluminous to labour for this meeting, I have made a digest of the leading features which come up with permission, I will read to you.

Woolston. Man and wife, two grown-up sons and an illegitimate child of the daughter, all sleep in one room; man and wife, with a son and two daughters, sleep in one room; two married couples and a child sleep in one room; man and wife, with daughter and sons, sleep in one room.

Watchfield. A father and three daughters sleep in one room on ground floor; seven persons in a two-roomed cottage of whom two are lodgers, sleeping in the pantry; a father sleeping with his daughter, 17 years of age, and the wife in another bed.

Shrivenham. Six cottages, having 35 inmates sleeping in six bedrooms, some of them grown-up sons and daughters, only one privy for the whole and that in a bad state.

Longcot. Man and wife with a child, one widower and one single woman with a child, making six persons sleeping in one room; two daughters, each with an illegitimate child age 20 cohabiting with a woman and for other persons making 10 in one room with two beds.

Fernham. 11 persons sleeping in two bedrooms on the ground floor, seven persons ditto, 10 persons son and daughter, over 16 years of age, with two other person's sleeping in one room; three sons and a daughter and two younger children with father and mother sleeping in room 10 by 12ft; two single men lodging with a man and wife with four children, making eight persons sleeping in one room, two brothers and two sisters, above 16 years of age, with father, mother, and 4 children, making 10 persons sleeping in one room.

Littleworth. Man and wife, with grown-up son, five children, and 4 lodgers, making 12 persons, sleeping in two rooms.

Faringdon. 16 cottages in Red Row. This is stated to be the most wretched place the reporter ever saw. Nine cottages lately indicted for a nuisance but still very bad. In the cottage the drain flows into the sitting room; and in another the drain at the front door is offensive. Three cottages are badly off for water. Several cottages in a bad state of drainage.

Lechlade. A man and wife, with a female lodger and five children sleeping "Pell-Mell" together.

Buckland. A man and wife, with two grown up girls and two other children, all sleeping in one room, a man and wife with four children, including a grown up girl, all sleep in one small room; a widow, with grown-up son and daughter and a lodger, all sleep in one room; a woman slept for a long time with a son aged 24.

Langford. These cottages are very old, but the occupants live with some regard to decency. I have not seen any places says the reporter, where the unmarried men sleep with the women.

Longworth. Most of the cottages in this village are very old, some of them scarcely fit to live in. Said to be ecclesiastical property.

Duxford. Ten cottages in a most wretched state, and ought to be taken down.

Kingston Lisle. Most of the cottages have only one small bedroom, yet the families are large, and the majority take lodgers. Example. Man and wife with five children and two men and three women lodgers, making 12 persons, sleeping in one room.

Balking. Man and wife, with grown up daughter and son and four illegitimate children of daughter, all sleep in one small room.

Eaton. Man and wife with two children live and sleep in one room - a wretched place.

Stanford. A son, over 16 years, sleeps with father and mother. Four wretched tenements, with only one sleeping room to each, occupied by large families, require the attendance of the sanitary officers. A man, as lodger with a family of six persons, all sleep one room, and that a wretched place. On another it is said, "a regular sty, not fit for human beings to live in," yet seven persons live and sleep in the same room, man and wife with five children and a lodger all sleep in one room. Four cottages, drainage and ventilation bad and quite destitute of water

Charney. Father with two daughters and a son, all grown up, sleeping one room. A widow with five children and her father all sleep in one room. Drainage bad and cottages generally in a most dilapidated state.

Bullocks' Pitts. 15 cottages in a most dilapidated state, many of the occupiers having large families of sons and daughters sleeping in one small room.

Buscot. 29 cottages, with only one bedroom to each, and most of them occupied by large families; a man and wife, with two daughters (one grown-up), sleep in one room; a man and wife, with three children, live and sleep in one very small room; a man with three children, and two men and one woman lodger, sleep in one small room; a man and wife with a son 15 years old and grown-up daughter sleep in one room

Uffington. A man and wife, with grown-up son and daughter and other children, sleep in one room; a man and wife a daughter and a son, with his wife, all sleep in one small room.

In addition to this degraded and degrading state of the agricultural labourers of England as regards domestic comfort, many of the villages are reported as having no school; and hence ignorance and vice go hand-in-hand, and no exertion appears to be made to check the demoralization of so larger portion of the community.

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It's significant to note that the village of Bourton was not in the list

