

**THE APPOINTMENT OF PARISH
OVERSEERS AND CONSTABLES IN
OSGATHORPE**



BY SAMUEL T STEWART - DECEMBER 2023

COMPLIMENTARY READING

"Poor Law & Parish Charity in Osgathorpe" / "The Osgathorpe Church Warden Accounts"/ "A Story About The Goodmans - A respected old Osgathorpe Family"

All publication are on the author's website under Osgathorpe samuelstewart.com

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OVERSEERS

In order to obtain an understanding of the complex responsibilities of the village overseers, of which two were elected annually, the reader will need to refer to the publication entitled "POOR LAW AND PARISH CHARITY IN OSGATHORPE", which provides a detailed analysis with case studies etc.

Whereas the churchwardens dealt partly with support for the travelling destitute, the village overseer organised the parish's maintenance of the poor or sick at Osgathorpe. However, in short, the overseers of the poor were responsible for administering poor relief in the village. They collected the poor rate, from the villagers and then distributed the money to those in most need of it. They were required to present accounts each year of what money was raised and on what it was spent. The responsibilities changed through the passage of time of course

The surviving detailed accounts are not very numerous but offer an insight into the social obligations of the parish and how they were discharged,. Paupers were on one hand stigmatised, and on the other supported, not only by subsistence payments, but to help with property repairs, rent, clothing and medical attention. The sense of almost a benevolent parish acting for those in temporary need, with a stricter approach demonstrated to others. The term 'benevolent' is misleading, as parish relief would have enabled survival and probably little more. **For example, the Overseer of 1746 "delivered 10s. 5d. to Elizabeth Hodgkinson who was ready to starve".**

James Elliott accounts for the year 1716

	£ 6 0
paid to Mary Duvall 6 ^g weeks for 52 weeks	01: 06: 00
paid on Thomas Bayliss account	03: 10: 00
paid for carriage to Nottingham	00: 01: 00
paid for Jane Cradsby lodging	00: 17: 04
paid to Richard Condon 1 ^g weeks for 31 weeks	01: 11: 00
paid his rent being one year and a half due	00: 15: 00
paid for washing of Richard Whalters shifts	00: 03: 00
paid for washing of John Brooks shifts	00: 05: 05
paid for coals for Mary Duvall	00: 02: 00
paid for mending his chimney	00: 00: 06
paid to John Coyne	00: 01: 06
paid to Mr. Gillsby that was due to him	00: 06: 00
gathered the loan	00: 01: 00
paid to John Marshall upon John Coyne account	00: 01: 05
	09: 01: 02
this account was given by	£ 6 by d. Lewis
the 29 th of April 1717	09: 01: 02

An example of the accounts of James Elliot who was overseer for the year 1716 CONSTABLES

The position of "Parish Constable", also referred to as a "Petty Constable" originated from the manorial courts and later became a fixture of the parish structure following the demise of the manorial system of governance. The constable was voted in by the parish ratepayers from amongst fellow ratepayers under the auspices of the parish vestry. Although by the early 17th century, the manor court had ceased to exercise control over the appointment of the constable, it was not until The Parish Constables Act of 1842 that the powers were formally and officially transferred to the parish and the local magistrates.

Like many official positions at the time, the position was obligatory, and unpaid, although the chosen constable had the right to employ someone to perform the role on their behalf. It was often a resented burden, as it involved a wide variety of extremely time consuming tasks

Vagabonds and beggars could be a drain on parish resources, under the Elizabethan Poor Law. They could also be a potential source of crime. Constables were expected to implement the Vagabonds and Beggars Act 1494, under which vagabonds and beggars were to be set in the stocks for three days, and then whipped until they leave the parish. The constable also had general responsibility for the local stocks, as well as for the pillory, and was expected to punish poachers, drunks, hedge-damagers, prostitutes, church-avoiders, and fathers of bastards.

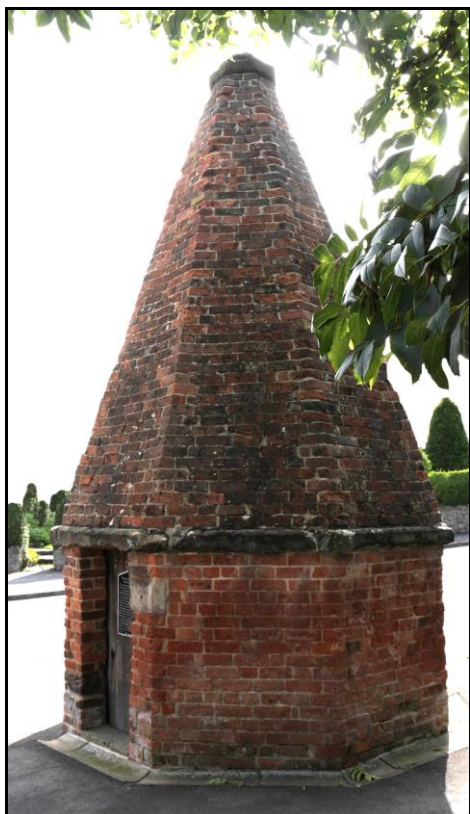
Parish constables were expected to monitor trading standards and pubs, catch rats, restrain loose animals, light signal beacons, provide local lodging and transport for the military, perform building control, attend inquests, and collect the parish rates. They were also responsible for collecting national taxes, within their area.

The Petty Constable operated at the parish level serving a one-year unpaid term. The duties were varied and included the collection of taxes and rates, arresting suspects, catching escaped prisoners, dealing with church non-attendance, evicting vagrants from the parish, compiling juror lists, overseeing the parish militia and many others. Much of his work was written up in the constable accounts which were kept in the parish chest.

In the late 18th and early 19th century, village "lock ups", also known as round houses, cages, watch houses, blind houses and clinks were temporary holding places for petty criminals. They were built in certain villages only for some reason and there is no evidence of one existing in Osgathorpe, Griffydam, Swannington or Coleorton. Around 200 were reputedly built around the country, and evidence of these still remain in local villages at Worthington, Breedon, Packington, Smisby and Ticknall.

They were used in small communities before Police Stations with cells brought about by the 1839 police act became commonplace.

These small and often quirky-shaped buildings were frequently used by the parish constables to house local drunks, vagrants and minor law breakers before they were taken and hauled up in front of the local magistrate. All of the above villages had an ample supply of pubs so there were always plenty of drunks to lock up.



Worthington



Smisby

Examples of octagonal shaped lock ups / round houses of red brick with an octagonal brick spire

The development of county police forces began with the 1839 County Police Act and from 1856 all counties and many boroughs were obliged to establish a police force. As county police forces were developed during the 19th century so the role of the parish constable became redundant. There were two Constable posts, one was the High Constable and the other the Petty Constable. The High Constable's jurisdiction covered the entire administrative area known as the "Hundred" and acted as the assistant to the county Lieutenant. He had a special responsibility for raising the muster when ordered by the Crown.

There follows a table of Osgathorpe village Overseers and Constables researched by the author from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. **Constables and Overseers were appointed for the division at "Special Court Petty Sessions" held at Ashby de la Zouch at the beginning of April every year. The constables elected by the parish served an unpaid "part time" one year term, although their duties suggest it was much more than part time. William Gilbert who held the post in 1884 was both a farmer and blacksmith, so he would have been a pretty busy individual.**

**TABLES OF OVERSEERS AND
CONSTABLES IN OSGATHORPE 1716 TO 1914**

YEAR	OVERSEERS	CONSTABLE
1716	JAMES ELLIOT	
1718	THOMAS CLARKE	
1722	BENJAMIN WALDRUM	
1723	WILLIAM BOULTBEE	
1814		P.C. GEORGE PEET – appointed at Leicestershire Lent assizes
1856		P.C. JAMES CLARKE P.C. JOSEPH PLATTS
1857	WILLIAM STOVES WILLIAM HYDE KELK THOMAS GILBERT (GUARDIAN)	P.C. JAMES CLARKE P.C. JOSEPH PLATTS
1859		P.C. JAMES CLARKE
1860	WILLIAM GOODMAN T. VARNHAM	P.C. WILLIAM GILBERT P.C. JOSEPH PLATTS
1861	JOSEPH PLATTS WILLIAM GOODMAN	P.C. WILLIAM GILBERT P.C. JAMES POWDRILL
1862	STEPHEN BAILEY	
1864		P.C. WILLIAM GILBERT
1866	WILLIAM CROSS WILLIAM GOODMAN	P.C. JOHN SIDDONS

1869		WILLIAM GILBERT STEPHEN DEAVILLE
1872	W. HOLLINGSHEAD H. MILES	WILLIAM GILBERT STEPHEN DEAVILLE
1876	WILLIAM GOODMAN RANDALL UPTON	P. C. JOSEPH PLATTS
1879	WILLIAM GOODMAN JAMES GILBERT	P.C. JOSEPH PLATTS
1881	WILLIAM GOODMAN JAMES GILBERT	P.C. JOSEPH PLATTS
1882	WILLIAM GOODMAN JOHN KEETLEY, JUN.	P.C. GEORGE KING
1883	WILLIAM GOODMAN THOMAS JOHNSON	P.C. GEORGE HINDS
1884	WILLIAM GOODMAN THOMAS JOHNSON	P.C. CHARLES GASBY
1885		P.C. DARBY
1886	WILLIAM GOODMAN WILLIAM CROSS	P.C. JOHN SIDDONS P.C. HARDY
1887	WILLIAM GOODMAN GEORGE KING	P.C. CHARLES GASBY
1906		P.C. JESSON
1914		P.C. JONES