



Wiltshire Workhouses

Semington

Melksham Union. Schoolmaster wanted. Wanted for the Semington Workhouse, a schoolmaster who will be required to pass the Examinations of Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools, and to perform the several duties specified in the Regulations of the Poor Law Board. He will also be required to instruct the boys in such Industrial Training as shall be directed by the Guardians, and to superintend the Cultivation of about Two Acres of Land.

Salary, Forty Pounds per annum, with such addition as he may be entitled to under the said Inspector's Certificate & the usual Rations of Workhouse Officers. The stipend of the present Schoolmaster amounts to Fifty-five Pounds per annum, exclusive of rations, etc.

Candidates are required to send applications in their own handwriting, stating their age and past and present occupation, with testimonials of character and competency, to me, on or before Wednesday, the second day of March next, and to attend a meeting of the Guardians, to be held at the Board Room, Semington Workhouse, at Eleven o'clock in the forenoon of Friday the fourth day of March, when the Election will take place.

Canvassing the Guardians, either personally or by letter, is strictly prohibited.

Philip Phelps
Clerk to the Guardians

Melksham 4th Feb, 1859

Trowbridge Advertiser, 12 February 1859

Melksham Union – At the fortnightly meeting of the Board of Guardians held on Friday, Feb 4th, the following Minute was unanimously adopted by the Guardians present, as a tribute of respect to the memory of their late Chairman:-

The Guardians present this day cannot separate without recording, on the minutes of their proceedings, the great loss they sustained since they last met, in the death of the Reverend Thomas Heathcote, who for a period of nearly nineteen years, discharged the important and onerous duties of Chairman of the Board of Guardians, with great credit to himself and advantage to the Guardians and rate-payers of this Union. The great attention paid by Mr. Heathcote to the duties of his office: the tact and singular judgment he at all times displayed assisting and guiding the officers of the Union: and the kind sympathy he ever showed towards those who were really objects of distress, will long be remembered by the Guardians who record the Minute, and who had the pleasure of acting with him.

Trowbridge Advertiser, 12 February 1859

Melksham Union – Persons desirous of Contracting with the Board of Guardians of this Union for supplying the Workhouse at Semington, from the 26th day of March instant, to the 25th day of June next, with the various Articles of Consumption [sic] and of various General Clothing usually required in Workhouses are requested personally to attend, and deliver Sealed Tenders, at the Board Room, Semington Workhouse, by or before Nine o'clock in the Forenoon of Friday, the 18th March instant. Separate Tenders will also be required for Flour, at per bag; and for Bread in Loaves of 4lbs. and of 2lbs. not having been baked less than twelve hours, both of the best quality.

Bread and Flour for the Workhouse
Bread for Trowbridge Out-Relief District
Meat for Sick Poor for Out-Relief District
Bread for Melksham Out-Relief District
Meat for Sick Poor for Out Relief District

The Articles to be delivered at such times and places and in such quantities as the Board of Guardians or their Officers shall direct.

The Form of Tender required by the Board, and which alone will be received, may be had of either of the Receiving Officers, at Trowbridge or Melksham, and no Tender will be received after Nine o'clock, a.m., by Railway Time. The attention of Contractors is directed to this Form, which if not duly filled up will be rejected. The Signature and Description of the proposed Surety must be obtained.

The Board do not pledge themselves to accept the lowest Tender.

Philip Phelps
Clerk to the Board

Melksham, March 8th 1859

N.B. All Bills due from the Union to be sent to the Workhouse addressed to the Finance Committee, on or before Wednesday the 30th day of March inst., and unless so delivered, such Bills will not be paid before the end of the next quarter.

Trowbridge Advertiser, 12 March 1859

Melksham Union – At the meeting of the Board of Guardians, held at the workhouse yesterday, W. Stancomb, Esq., in the chair, we made an application by letter addressed to the chairman, for permission to attend the ordinary meetings of the Board, for the purpose of reporting the proceedings for publication in the Advertiser.

The Chairman having read the letter, we were called into the Board room, and courteously informed that a similar application had some years ago been made and refused, and that in this instance the Guardians assembled were desirous to ascertain the opinions of the members of the Board not present; it had therefore been resolved to take our request into consideration at the next meeting. With this considerate entertainment of the application we expressed our present satisfaction with thanks, and retired.

Trowbridge Advertiser, 3 September 1859

That "half a loaf is better than no bread", and that ten shillings in the pound is preferable to no dividend at all, are rational truisms " which nobody can deny", and therefore for the present we respectfully bow to the decision of the Melksham Board of Guardians, excluding us from their meetings, and, as respectfully,

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accept their offer to furnish us with weekly statistics and such occasional information as may be of interest to rate-payers. At the same time, we take leave to say that a body elected by popular suffrage, and entrusted with the disbursement of public funds, might have discerned and adopted "a more excellent way" than the resolution which, either unanimously, or by a majority, forbids a recognized representative and protector of rate-payers to cross the threshold of the room in which the expenditure of public funds is periodically discussed and determined upon.

The Free Press of this free country is almost ubiquitous and omnipresent. It has its galleries in the halls of the National Senate, its boxes in the Courts of Law, its seat at the table of all great Directories; but, anomalous as it may seem, neither a stool nor a standing place where the representatives of a rural district deliberate and resolve upon matters and things seriously affecting the social condition of the local community, and the pecuniary interests of the constituency which elevated them to a responsible office. We are quite aware, as we have intimated to the Board of Guardians, that there are occasionally topics of discussion and conversation which ought not to be publicly detailed, but this forms no reason for closed doors and private counsels; any man qualified to be the representative, or as in our case the conductor, of a public journal, is quite as competent to exercise proper discretion, relative to publicity, as any gentleman entrusted with the difficult and delicate management of parochial affairs.

To some ears this may sound like the egotistical blast of an Editorial trumpet, but "facts are stubborn things," and we challenge either demur or denial when asserting that the presence of the representatives of the public press, in any place, or on any occasion, has never been found detrimental to the public interest. In the metropolitan unions and parishes, as well as in our provincial cities and large towns, reporters are freely admitted, and courteously accommodated, without a dream of mischief; and the consequences are that the guardians are prudently economical, and rate-payers have effectual protection against excessive local taxation.

As already intimated, we readily accept the information which the Board of this Union has offered to supply; but we receive it as the instalment of a concession to which the rate-payers are entitled, and the denial of which elsewhere would excite ridicule and provoke indignation, fruitful in practical results at the next popular election. However "Nil desperandum auspice Deo!" To the rate payers, we present what we are able to ascertain, and, if the information be meagre, our apology is

"We give thee all, we can no more,
Though poor the offering be"

And to the Board of Guardians, we express a hope of living to knock again at their portals and cry successfully "Open sesame"

Trowbridge Advertiser, 24 September 1859

Melksham Union – The fortnightly meeting of the board of guardians was held at the workhouse, Semington, on Friday the 16th inst. W. Simpson, Esq., in the chair. As promised at the previous meeting, our request to be permitted to report the proceeding of the ordinary meeting of the board, was taken into consideration and was decided in the negative, but the clerk was requested to inform us that the board have no objection to our being furnished with a weekly report of the number of persons relieved, and the amount of relief; with such other information as may be of interest to the rate-payers. Mr. Phelps had consequently furnished us with the particulars which are appended.

Contracts:- The following tenders were accepted for supplying the union workhouse with provisions etc., and the out-relief districts with bread for the quarter ending 24th December next.
Mr. John Steeds, Trowbridge, beef without bone, 5d per lb, suet, and mutton 6 ½d ; meat for officers 6 ½d.

Mr. W. Porter, Melksham, bacon 6 ½d per lb.; salt butter 1s; tea, 2s 11d; oatmeal 19s per cwt; rice, 13s 6d; mottled soap, £1 13s; soda, 2s 9d; blue, 1s per lb; candles, 6s 10 ½ d per dozen; scrubbing brushes, 12s per dozen; long brooms, £1 10s; bass brooms 18s; mops, 12s

Mr. James Dicks, Semington, bread of best quality, 4 ½ d per 4lb loaf 18 per cwt.; starch, 4 ½ d per lb

Mrs. Jane Watson, Melksham, best seconds flour, 32s per bag

Mr. Edwin Rawlings, Hilperton, sugar, 5d per lb; salt, 1s 9d per cwt; pepper, 1s 1d per lb; vinegar, 1s 2d per gallon; treacle 2 ¼ d per lb; arrow root, 1s; yellow soap, £1 18s per cwt; starch 4 ½ d per lb.

Mr. Stephen Young, Semington, milk, 2 ½ d per quart; beer, 4 ½ d.

Mr. John Theobald, Semington, rubble coals, 15s 6d per ton; small coal, 8s 9d.

Bread for Out-Relief – Trowbridge District
d per 4lb loaf.

Mr. Edwin Rawlings, Hilperton, bread of best quality, 4 ½

Bread for Out-Relief – Melksham District

Mrs. Watson, Melksham, best bread, 4 ½ d per 4lb loaf

Trowbridge Advertiser, 24 September 1859

September 17. Number of Workhouse inmates, September 10th, 106; admitted 9, discharged 3, present number 112. Corresponding week last year 117. Imbeciles or idiots in the workhouse 11. Lunatics in asylums 20. Out – door relief, Trowbridge 911 persons. Value in kind £8 18s 7 ¼ d, in money £68 6s 3d. Melksham, persons 344, in kind £2 9s 10 ½ d, in money £30 2s 6 ½ d. Union totals, persons, 1255, in 1858 – 1372. Relief £109 17s 3 ¼ d, in kind, in 1858, £122 4s 11 ¼ d.

Trowbridge Advertiser 24 September 1859

Melksham Union – Persons desirous of Contracting with the Board of Guardians of this Union for supplying the Workhouse at Semington, from the 24th day of September, inst, to the 24th day of December next, with the various Articles of Consumption and of various General Clothing usually required in Workhouses are requested personally to attend, and deliver Sealed Tenders, at the Board Room, Semington Workhouse, by or before Nine o'clock in the Forenoon of Friday, the 16th September instant.

Separate Tenders will also be required for Flour, at per bag; and for Bread in Loaves of 4lbs. and of 2lbs. not having been baked less than twelve hours, both of the best quality.

Bread and Flour for the Workhouse
Bread for Trowbridge Out-Relief District
Meat for Sick Poor for Out-Relief District
Bread for Melksham Out-Relief District
Meat for Sick Poor for Out-Relief District

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The Board do not pledge themselves to accept the lowest Tender.

Philip Phelps
Clerk to the Board

Melksham, September 5th 1859

N.B. All Bills due from the Union to be sent to the Workhouse addressed to the Finance Committee, on or before Wednesday the 28th day of September instant, and unless so delivered, such Bills will not be paid before the end of the next quarter.

Trowbridge Advertiser, 10 September 1859

Melksham Union – Number of inmates in the workhouse, September 17th, 112; admitted 3, discharged 4, numbers Sep. 24th, 111, being 3 less than on the corresponding day last year. . Out-door relief, Trowbridge paupers 914, relief in kind £7 2s 8 ¼ d, money, £66 8s, total £73 10s 8 ¼ d. Melksham, paupers 341, relief in kind £2 9s 1d, in money £29 13s 7d, total £32 2s 8d. Being in grand totals, 799 paupers, and relief £105 13s 4 ¼ d. In 1858 during the corresponding week the number and amount were 817 paupers and £117 4s 4 ½ d relief. The statement of in-door and out-door relief for the half year ending September 24th, shows the following figures, - Indoor 1859 £209 2s 10 ½ d; 1858, £364 19s 7d. Out-door, 1859, £2938 11s 3d; 1858, £3168 18s 11d.

Trowbridge Advertiser, 1 October 1859

Melksham Union. Wanted a Schoolmaster for the Workhouse. He must be a person of good moral and religious character, and competent to instruct the children in reading, writing and arithmetic, and the principles of the Christian religion, and to train them up to habits of usefulness, industry, and virtue. Salary £20 per annum with board and lodging in the House.

Persons desirous of the situation, are requested to send their names, accompanied by proper testimonials, to the Clerk, not later than the 19th day of December next, and will be expected to attend personally at the meeting of the Board, at the Workhouse, at Semington, on Friday, the 23rd day of December next, at Eleven o'clock in the morning, when and where the Election is fixed to take place.

Philip Phelps
Clerk to the Board

Melksham, 14th November 1859

Trowbridge Advertiser, 19 November 1859

Melksham Union – The Religious Instruction of Orphan Children in The Workhouse. – The following resolutions in reference to the Order of the Poor Law Board on this subject were unanimously adopted by the Guardians of this Union at their fortnightly meeting held on the 9th inst. Resolved. That this Board having had under its consideration an Order of the Poor Law Board, dated 23rd August, 1859, considers such Order to be needless, as ample provision for religious instruction is already made, and liberty of

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conscience secured for every inmate of a Union Workhouse, as set forth by articles 122 and 126 of the General Consolidated Orders. This Board is further of opinion that the provisions of the Order in question, conflict with the Protestant character of the Government of this country, and it would be most undesirable to attempt to enforce them. This Board therefore request that the said Order be rescinded.

- 2 That no direction be given to the Master of the Workhouse to enable him to act under the said Order.
- 3 That a copy of the above resolutions be sent to the Poor Law Board.

Trowbridge Advertiser, 17 December 1859