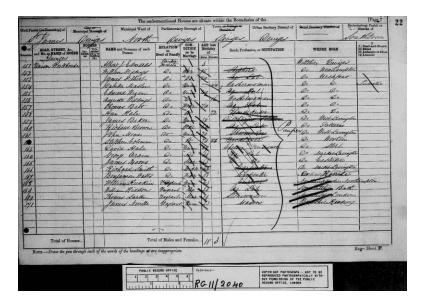
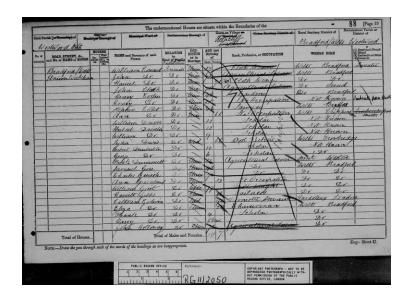
Murder In The Workhouse

Stephen Coleman was born in Worton in about 1810. He was the son of Stephen and Ann Coleman (nee Abrams) both of Worton who had married at Potterne on 24th December 1808. Stephen Jnr. was baptised on December 30th 1810 at St. Mary's Church in Potterne and he was married to Sarah (maiden name not known) from Walcot in Somerset and he was employed as a farm labourer in Alverstoke, Hampshire in 1851.

There is no trace of him in the census returns of 1861 and 1871 but by 1881 he was an inmate of Devizes Union Workhouse.



In the same Census year in the Union Workhouse at Bradford on Avon was another pauper one Charles Gerrish also born circa 1811 an agricultural labourer who was born in Bradford.



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Fate and fire would unite these two men forever in history.

On Thursday 24th November 1881, no doubt after a hard day working out in the wintery country side these two elderly paupers sat around the warming fire of the Devizes Union Workhouse where Gerrish had arrived between the census night of 1881 and that fateful Thursday night in November.

At some point the two men began to quarrel after Gerrish told the other man, Stephen Coleman, that it was his turn to get warm. Coleman seemingly refused to move and allow Gerrish more warmth. Gerrish in a fit of anger grabbed a red hot poker from between the bars on the grate of the fire and thrust it into Coleman's neck. Coleman died instantly. Gerrish was charged with his murder and following his trial was convicted of the felony and sentenced to hang.

Gerrish was hanged by at Devizes Gaol on the 31st January 1882 at the age of seventy. He was executed by William Marwood who had developed the more "humane" process of the "long drop" method of hanging, which broke the neck causing almost instant death rather than the "short drop" which meant the condemned man could linger for several hours until he expired.

Stephen Coleman was buried in Christchurch churchyard in Worton, his home village.