

# 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 Deizes Union Workhouse.

The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the

Civil Parish (or Township) of	Municipal Borough of	Municipal Ward of	Parliamentary Borough of	Urban Sanitary District of	Rural Sanitary District of	Registration District of
Worton	Worton	North	Worton	Worton	Worton	Worton
ROAD, STREET, ALLEY, or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSE No.	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION Head of Family	AGE last Birthday	Rank, Profession, or OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN
117 Union Workhouse		John Coleman	Head	45	Labourer	Worton, Wilts
118		Ann Coleman	Wife	40		Worton, Wilts
119		James Coleman	Son	18		Worton, Wilts
120		Elizabeth Coleman	Daughter	15		Worton, Wilts
121		Thomas Coleman	Son	12		Worton, Wilts
122		James Coleman	Son	10		Worton, Wilts
123		Ann Coleman	Daughter	8		Worton, Wilts
124		Richard Coleman	Son	6		Worton, Wilts
125		John Coleman	Son	4		Worton, Wilts
126		Elizabeth Coleman	Daughter	3		Worton, Wilts
127		James Coleman	Son	2		Worton, Wilts
128		Ann Coleman	Daughter	1		Worton, Wilts
129		Richard Coleman	Son	0		Worton, Wilts
130		John Coleman	Son	0		Worton, Wilts
131		Elizabeth Coleman	Daughter	0		Worton, Wilts
132		James Coleman	Son	0		Worton, Wilts
133		Ann Coleman	Daughter	0		Worton, Wilts
134		Richard Coleman	Son	0		Worton, Wilts
135		John Coleman	Son	0		Worton, Wilts
136		Elizabeth Coleman	Daughter	0		Worton, Wilts
137		James Coleman	Son	0		Worton, Wilts
138		Ann Coleman	Daughter	0		Worton, Wilts
139		Richard Coleman	Son	0		Worton, Wilts
140		John Coleman	Son	0		Worton, Wilts
141		Elizabeth Coleman	Daughter	0		Worton, Wilts
Total of Houses...		Total of Males and Females...		118		

NOTE.—Draw the pen through each of the words of the headings as are inappropriate.

Page 22

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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.

The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the

Civil Parish (or Township) of	Municipal Borough of	Municipal Ward of	Parliamentary Borough of	Urban Sanitary District of	Rural Sanitary District of	Registration District of
Bradford on Avon	Bradford on Avon	North	Bradford on Avon	Bradford on Avon	Bradford on Avon	Bradford on Avon
ROAD, STREET, ALLEY, or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSE No.	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION Head of Family	AGE last Birthday	Rank, Profession, or OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN
117 Union Workhouse		William Gerrish	Head	45	Labourer	Bradford, Wilts
118		Ann Gerrish	Wife	40		Bradford, Wilts
119		James Gerrish	Son	18		Bradford, Wilts
120		Elizabeth Gerrish	Daughter	15		Bradford, Wilts
121		Thomas Gerrish	Son	12		Bradford, Wilts
122		James Gerrish	Son	10		Bradford, Wilts
123		Ann Gerrish	Daughter	8		Bradford, Wilts
124		Richard Gerrish	Son	6		Bradford, Wilts
125		John Gerrish	Son	4		Bradford, Wilts
126		Elizabeth Gerrish	Daughter	3		Bradford, Wilts
127		James Gerrish	Son	2		Bradford, Wilts
128		Ann Gerrish	Daughter	1		Bradford, Wilts
129		Richard Gerrish	Son	0		Bradford, Wilts
130		John Gerrish	Son	0		Bradford, Wilts
131		Elizabeth Gerrish	Daughter	0		Bradford, Wilts
132		James Gerrish	Son	0		Bradford, Wilts
133		Ann Gerrish	Daughter	0		Bradford, Wilts
134		Richard Gerrish	Son	0		Bradford, Wilts
135		John Gerrish	Son	0		Bradford, Wilts
136		Elizabeth Gerrish	Daughter	0		Bradford, Wilts
137		James Gerrish	Son	0		Bradford, Wilts
138		Ann Gerrish	Daughter	0		Bradford, Wilts
139		Richard Gerrish	Son	0		Bradford, Wilts
140		John Gerrish	Son	0		Bradford, Wilts
141		Elizabeth Gerrish	Daughter	0		Bradford, Wilts
Total of Houses...		Total of Males and Females...		118		

NOTE.—Draw the pen through each of the words of the headings as are inappropriate.

Page 88

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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.