



Bastardy Payment Under Poor Law

Bastard Pay was made by the Overseers of the Poor to unsupported single mothers until the child reached the age of 14. This was in addition to any other Poor Relief paid to the mothers and appeared separately in the Overseers' monthly accounts.

In 1824 the amount paid each month by the Wroughton Overseers was generally 6s. for a single child although there were exceptions. In all, 36 women received Bastard Pay at various times throughout that year, most were paid monthly but some did not collect for two or more months and then received a back payment. Of the 36, some ceased being paid during the year as their children reached the age of 14, others started being paid only part-way through the year after giving birth.

During the period 1810 to 1824, there were 661 baptisms in Wroughton parish church and while baptisms do not equate to births in any particular year, they do give an approximation of the village's birth-rate. Of those 661 baptisms, 70 were of children born to 65 single women (10.6% of all baptisms). There were 101 infant burials during the same period of which nine were "base-born" children.

It is interesting to note here that while the infant mortality rate for the population as a whole was 15.3%, for illegitimate children it was only 12.9%.

Not all single mothers received Bastard Pay: some were being supported by the fathers or other family members, others came from families that could not be classed as pauper. Ten of the 65 mothers of illegitimate babies born between 1810 and 1824 got married within three years of giving birth.

The table lists all the Wroughton baptisms of children born to single mothers from 1810 to 1824, indicating which mothers received Bastard Pay at any time during 1824.

Notes:

1. Bastard Pay was granted to Betty Pickett for three, later two, children, and to Elizabeth Pickett for one child, but only the name Elizabeth was used in the baptismal records for all four children and it has not been possible to determine which three children were siblings.

2. At the end of the list are the names of three mothers who received Bastard Pay but who had not had their children baptised at Wroughton.