

OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION STUDY DAY

LOOKING AFTER THE POOR: CRISIS AND REFORM – DID THE WORKHOUSE WORK?

Saturday 10th November 2012

**Royse Room, Abingdon Guildhall,
Abbey Close, Abingdon OX14 3JE
(map overleaf)**

**Includes a private tour
of Christ's Hospital Hall
at the Long Alley Almshouses
(not usually open to the public).**

9.30 Coffee and Registration

10.00 The Poor Law in the Eighteenth Century – Parish Provision in Crisis

Parishes had been made formally responsible for the relief of their poor by the Poor Law of 1601, and this had seemed to work (more or less) through the 17th century. Growing unemployment in the 18th meant that by the end of the century many parishes were in crisis, with those paying the poor rate struggling to keep up with the demands of the poor, and vestries resorting to a variety of different schemes to balance the books. No-one called the problem 'benefit dependency', but politicians and commentators could recognize it, and it was the growing numbers claiming their parish 'rights' that led to the draconian 1834 reforms.

Deborah Hayter did her MA in Local History at the Centre for English Local History at Leicester University. She is an associate tutor at Oxford University's Department for Continuing Education, and has taught many courses, particularly in rural and landscape history. Her most recent was on 'Looking After the Poor in the Past – from Mediaeval Charity to Modern Welfare State'.

11.15 Break

11.30 A National Solution: Did the Workhouse Work?

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 created a standardised system of poor relief with central control. Its aims were to reduce expenditure and encourage paupers to be more self-sufficient. Wantage Union and its workhouse were typical of most rural unions in Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Looking mainly at evidence from Wantage and other Berkshire unions we can investigate whether or not the New Poor Law fulfilled its aims. After retiring from teaching, **Hazel Brown** discovered a new interest on attending local history courses at Rewley House in Oxford. A study of the Wantage Union after the passing of the 1834 Act led to a book on this subject (*Gallon Loaves and Fustian Frocks: The Wantage Union & Workhouse 1835 – 1900*; privately printed 2008) and a continuing interest in the Victorian poor. More recently she has been researching the history of the Wantage Town Lands, a charity set up in 1597, which is still responsible for some of the Wantage almshouses.

12.45 Christ's Hospital of Abingdon

An introduction by Archivist and Governor, Jacqueline Smith.

1.00 Lunch - there are many places to eat in town, including the Museum café.

2.30 Visits

A private tour of **Christ's Hospital Hall at the Long Alley Almshouses** (not usually open to the public).

The County Hall Museum, re-opened in July after extensive refurbishment, is open free for self-conducted visits. A small charge is made for entry to the roof (from where celebratory buns are thrown).

Booking Form – OLHA Study Day on the Poor, November 10th 2012

Member name(s) Number of places @ £12.....
Name of local society if relevant.....
Member address

Please send this slip and a cheque made to 'OLHA' to Liz Woolley, 138 Marlborough Road, Oxford, OX1 4LS (01865 242760, liz@lizwoolley.co.uk) **For an acknowledgement please write your e-mail address here:**

All car parks offer long stay (over 6 hours) apart from The Charter, where it is offered only on the fifth floor and above. Consult www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk for prices. The car park on the south side of the river is cheapest. There are frequent bus services.

