

Selected Extracts from Cowfold Vestry Minutes, 1872 to 1885

Introduction

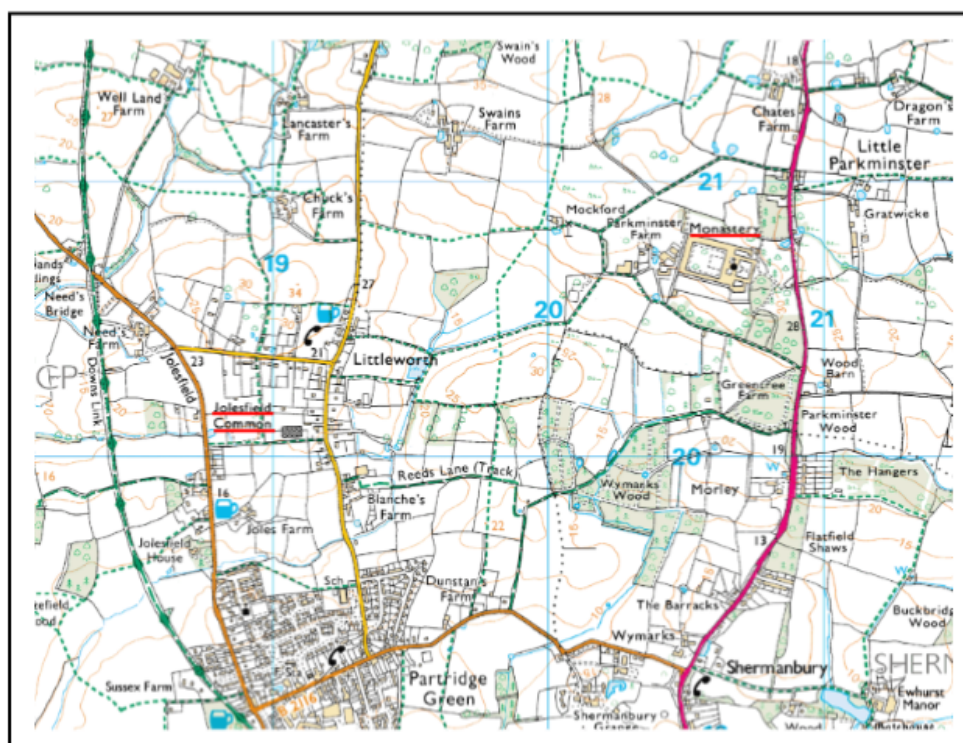
Before the formation of parish councils at the end of the nineteenth century, village matters were administered by “The Vestry”. As the name suggests, the meetings were convened in the church vestry (although were frequently adjourned to a local inn) and were chaired by the vicar. They were normally held on a monthly basis, with an annual meeting on Easter Monday to approve the accounts of the outgoing officers and the election of new ones.

Its responsibilities included:

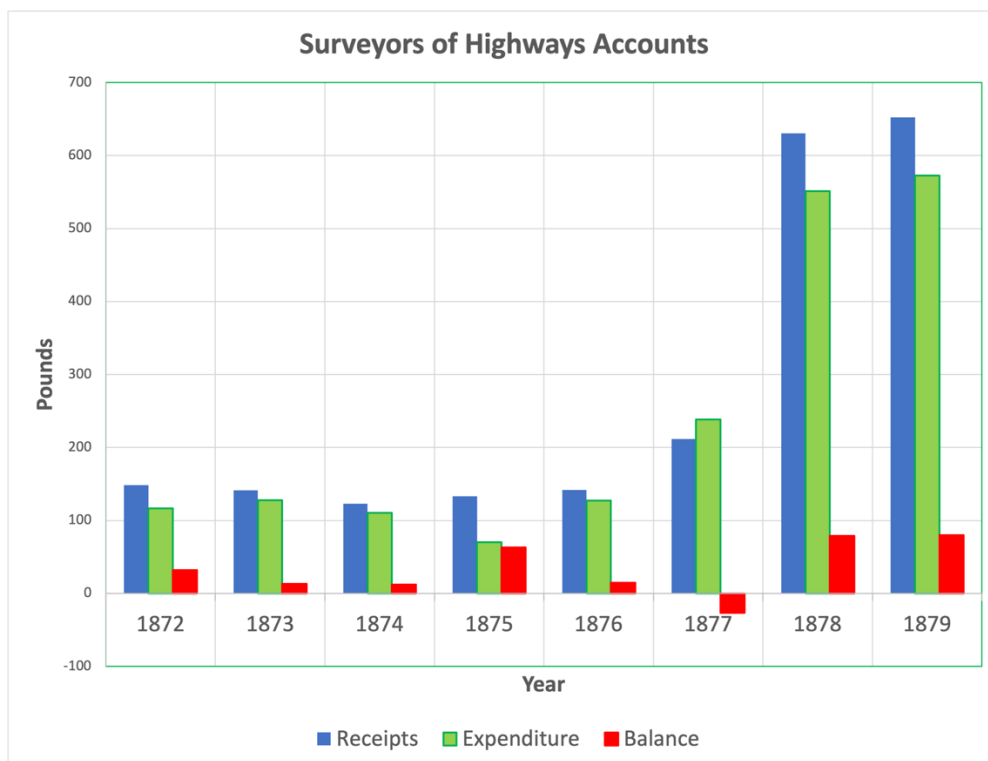
- the appointment of parish officers, including churchwardens, surveyors, waywardens, overseers of the poor, etc
- the upkeep of roads
- the relief of the poor (until the New Poor Law of 1834) and
- maintenance of the church and churchyard.

The vestry minutes rarely record the ebb and flow of the discussions in the meetings but do provide interesting information on key parish affairs of the day. The following two extracts were made by David Pavitt and concern issues associated with the construction of the monastery in the 1870s.

The first extract covers the period from 1873 to 1878 and documents a request to divert a footpath running in a westerly direction from the Lodge on the Cowfold to Henfield Road to Jolesfield Common on Littleworth Lane. We do not have a map from this time that shows public rights of way but the current arrangements of public footpaths is shown below:



The second extract covers the years from 1872 to 1885 and shows the increase in the expenditure on the repair and maintenance of the roads through the village over this period, due in large part to the supply of materials for the construction of the monastery but also the advent of mechanised transport in the form of traction engines. A graph summarising the figures given in the extract is presented below:



The extract also includes an investigation of whether or not the parish had paid more for flints than had been delivered – was a truck load eight or ten tons?

Extract 1: Picknowle Right of Way

7.8.1873 Mr Thos Pierce raised the matter of a “certain right of way leading from the Horsham and Henfield road at the back of Parknowle” and the Vestry appointed a committee to investigate and report back.

25.9.1873 The committee reported “they had been unable to come to any decision on the matter”. After the examination of a few old residents on the matter in point “it was decided that further consideration of the foot road running through Picknowle Farm be postponed to a further Vestry with a view of negotiations being entered into for the purpose of diverting the footpath from the Lodge to a point farther northward”. Mr Waugh was to be instructed to meet the solicitor for the owners of Picknowle on the question.

(Wm Percival Boxall and the Rev Pascal Sene accompanied by another monk and their solicitor, Geo M Arnold, were present; also, the solicitor E Waugh).

26.2.1874 The meeting considered “the footpath running from the Cowfold and Henfield Turnpike road across Picknowle Farm in this parish to Jolesfield Common and Partridge Green”. The parish’s solicitor “Mr Waugh having confirmed the Vestry that no definite reply had been received from Mr Arnold” regarding the resolution 25.9.1873, it was resolved that “Mr Waugh be instructed on behalf of the parish to press for the immediate removal of all obstructions to the public footpaths running from the highroad past Picknowle House and that failing this being done, he be instructed to indict the persons causing the obstructions or to take such other proceedings as he may be advised for obtaining a removal of the obstructions and reopening the footpath for the use of the public.

(Those present included Mr Fooks, solicitor for the owners of Picknowle, for the Rev Monsignor Dennis, and Mr Waugh, solicitor for the surveyors).

26.3.1874 A committee was appointed to consult on the subject with Mr Waugh.

16.4.1874 The committee reported as follows: “A footway which has been offered by the owners of Picknowle (in lieu of the one past their residence) leading from ‘A’, a point being the south west of enclosure No. 903 on the parish map to ‘B’ a point south west of enclosure No 914 on the same map is already a public footpath part of which has been illegally stopped or diverted by Mr Boxall. The committee recommend that if the owners of Picknowle will make a fresh footpath from the above point ‘B’ through Nos 900, 899, 898, 888, 889, 886 and 884 on the map aforesaid and joining the Henfield Turnpike road at No 884 on the said map, that the said owners be allowed to stop up the intervening paths running past the old and new houses on their property”.

The Vestry agreed that they should “require that both the above named paths (should the latter be adopted by the owners of Picknowle) be permanently kept in a state fit for foot passengers by the said owners and that the whole of the law expenses incurred both on the side of the parish as well as on their side, both past and future, relative to this matter be borne by the said owners since the Vestry consider that the whole of the proposed alterations are for the accommodation of the aforesaid owners of Picknowle”.

9.7.1874 Mr Waugh wrote to the Vestry, “I saw Mr Arnold yesterday as to the proposal of the Vestry. His client declines making the pink road and insists that the roads coloured yellow on the plan are all private roads. If the pink road is not insisted on they are willing to shorten the first road they proposed and will enter into a deed to make it of good material and to keep it in good repair for ever”.

The Vestry agreed to “the owners of Picknowle closing the road through their Lodge gate if they carry out their proposal to “confer with Mr Waugh concerning the parish roads running though Picknowle” and the Vestry instructed him to “proceed at once (if necessary)” in accordance with the resolution 26.2.1874.

11.10.1877 It was resolved “that the Waywardens together with Mr Leppard and such other persons as they may choose do inspect complained of obstructions through Parknowle, Gods Hill and Mockford Farms” and report back.

19.10.1877 The Vestry agreed a resolution to “resolve considering that the obstructions complained of to old footpaths running across Picknowle and Mockford Farms have not been removed that the Waywardens be requested to open such roads forthwith as they consider proved to be old paths”. It was agreed to send this resolution “to the authorities of the monastery before any stops be taken to remove the obstructions”.

22.11.1877 In considering “obstructions to public footpaths running from the Henfield Road to Jolesfield Common and Partridge Green” it was resolved “that the Waywardens be directed to communicate with their solicitor and instruct him to take such steps as may be necessary for the immediate removal of all obstructions to the old footpath running through Picknowle and Mockford Farms. The Rev Fortune Devroux” who was present at the meeting “offered to contribute towards the expense incurred by him on the parish roads which the Vestry desired to return him thanks for”.

7.12.1877 “The obstructions to the footpaths leading from the Henfield road to Jolesfield Common and Partridge Green” were reported as still remaining. The Waywardens were “directed to remove all obstructions to the footpaths which are complained of and should they be renewed that their solicitor be instructed forthwith to proceed for the abatement of the nuisances”. The Rev Fortune Devroux was present.

22.2.1878 The meeting was to receive “a proposition from the owners of Picknowle in this parish relative to the diversion of certain footways across their property”. “J G Langham Esq solicitor appeared on behalf of the parish and Fooks Esq attended on behalf of the Rev Fortune Devroux, the proposer of the diversion of the footpath and announced that the proposal was withdrawn and that the old footpath through Little Picknowle Farm and passing at the back of Great Picknowle Farm house should remain unaltered. Mr Devroux being willing to pay the expense of the professional adviser of the Vestry relating to the matter”. The parish wished the legal rights of the public over footways to remain unaltered and it was agreed that “there now exists and has existed from time immemorial a public footway through Picknowle entered from the Cowfold and Henfield road at the present Lodge entrance of the Picknowle and that such footpath has been and is obstructed by building across it and that in the opinion of this Vestry such obstruction ought to be removed and that notice of this resolution be given to the owners of Picknowle. Mr Fooks the solicitor for the owners of Picknowle, being present, accepted notice of the foregoing resolution but denied that any such public footpath as alleged has ever existed.

Extract 2: Surveyors of Highways

1.4.1872	Accounts for the year:
	Receipts £148- 9- 7
	Expenditure <u>£116-14- 3</u>
	Balance <u>£ 31-15- 4</u>

25.3.1873 Accounts for the year:
 Receipts £141- 3-11³/₄
 Expenditure £127-16- 9³/₄
 Balance £ 13- 7- 2

26.3.1874 Accounts for the year:
 Receipts £122-13-11¹/₂
 Expenditure £110- 9- 2³/₄
 Balance £ 12- 4- 8³/₄

25.3.1875 Accounts for the year:
 Receipts £133- 4-10
 Expenditure £ 70- 5-10¹/₄
 Balance £ 62-18-11³/₄

23.3.1876 Accounts or the year:
 Receipts £141-15- 9
 Expenditure £127- 6- 5¹/₂
 Balance £ 14- 9- 3¹/₂

26.3.1877 Accounts for the year:
 Receipts £211-13- 7¹/₄
 Expenditure £238- 6- 11¹/₂
 Balance due £ 26- 13- 4¹/₄

17.5.1877 The Vestry approved “of a memorial to the Secretary of State for the Home Department to forbid the use of traction engines for drawing stone for building purposes on the high roads in Cowfold parish”. A committee was also appointed “to confer with the trustees of the Cowfold and Henfield Turnpike Road and with any representatives who may be appointed by the parishes of Lower Beeding and Nuthurst and otherwise to take action on behalf of the parish of Cowfold in the matter and particularly as to the demand made upon the parish by the Trustees.

25.3.1878 Accounts for the year:
 Receipts £630-10- 5¹/₄
 Expenditure £551- 8- 5³/₄
 Balance £ 79- 1- 11¹/₂

A committee was appointed to “examine and contrast the expenditure on the roads of the parish” during the years 1875-76, 1876-77 and 1877-78.

22.4.1878 The report of the foregoing committee “showed an increase of about £233 for the past year over and above the average of the previous seven years”. The Vestry instructed the Assistant Overseer “to forward a copy of the report to the Rev Fortune Devroux accompanied by a letter informing him, as he had frequently expressed the wish to be presented with the particulars of the extra expenditure on the highways of the parish

caused by the excessive traffic to the monastery, the Vestry appointed a committee to examine the accounts and now forward to him their report”.

9.5.1878 The Vestry considered “an offer of a contribution made by the owners of Parkminster towards the extra expenditure on the highways”. A letter from the Rev Fortune Devroux in answer to the Vestry’s letter and report “contained an offer by him to contribute the sum of £117 towards the extra expenditure”. It was agreed that the offer be accepted. The Vestry also resolved to send a copy of the same report “to the contractors who are building the monastery and likewise to Mr Ankerson who is supplying stone for the same with a statement that the Rev F Devroux had kindly contributed and that in large works it was usual for contractors to be asked to contribute something towards extra wear and tear of roads”.

3.10.1878 The Highways and Locomotives (Amendment) Act “of the last sessions” having been received from the Local Government Board, it was agreed “that the accounts of the Surveyors of the Highways of this parish be balanced up to the 29th September ult and that the Assistant Surveyor await the form of the Local Government Board for keeping accounts in future according to the Act of Parliament.

25.3.1879 Accounts for the year (the last year for which they are recorded):

Receipts	£652- 9- 1¾
Expenditure	<u>£572-13- 9½</u>
Balance	<u>£ 79-15- 4¼</u>

19.6.1879 The Surveyors were requested “to open the ditch and take up the drainpipes leading from a culvert near Ivory’s Lodge on the highway”, ie Burnt House Lane, “and make an opening through the bank to allow free course for the water”.

2.10.1879 The Vestry considered “an application for contribution from the County Rate towards the main road expenditure in this parish”. “The accounts having been kept in accordance of letter from Highway Committee dated June 10th it is now impossible to separate the past expenditure on the old Henfield Cowfold and Horsham from the Cuckfield and West Grinstead road”. The Surveyors were to confer with Mr Merrifield “as to auditing the accounts as they now stand.

11.3.1880 The Vestry considered advice on “the liability of the parish to repair a bridge at Picts Hill”. A letter from Mr Edw Waugh of Cuckfield of 2nd March 1880 stated “generally the County is liable to repair all bridges but in some particular instances private persons are liable by reason of the tenure of their property. I understand from you that as to the bridge now in question, Mr Hoper and Mr Durrant have on previous occasions done the repairs. This is prima facie evidence of their liability to repair and before calling upon the County or taking any proceedings I think the surveyors should serve formal notices on Mr Hoper and Mr Durrant requiring them to do the necessary repairs, probably neither of them will dispute his liability but will be willing to do what is now necessary”. Mr Stephen Yeates, one of the surveyors, had served notices as recommended by the solicitor.

24.6.1880 The Surveyors were empowered to appoint Mr James Ireland as collector of the highway rates at a salary of £10 per annum.

21.10.1880 In discussion as to the relative cost of stone and flints for road repairs the surveyor stated that "had he not been refused stone where he wished to dig it" the rate then being authorized "would not have been called for so early, and he was sorry to tell the Vestry he had been compelled to apply to the Justices of the Peace for this district for a license to dig stone on land belonging to the Rev John Goring and Richard Ramsden Esq, which license was granted by such justices sitting at a highway sessions at the Town Hall, Horsham" on 7.8.1880. Mr Ramsden had given notice of appeal at the sessions against the Justices' decision and the Vestry agreed "that the matter be allowed to take its course". (Mr Ramsden was present and a motion to drop the case of the Surveyors v Ramsden having been lost, Mr Ramsden demanded a poll of the parish on that motion but this was refused by the chairman "as being irregular".)

27.3.1882 A salary of £12-10-0 for a collector of rates was authorised.

3.7.1884 A meeting was requested by Mr Jas Longhurst, one of the surveyors, Mr Stephen Yeates being the other. Among others present were Mr Stapley, vendor of flints for use in the parish and Mr Wm Thos Burlton, station clerk at West Grinstead station. Mr Yeates requested that the statement which Mr Longhurst now made to the meeting should be taken down in writing. Mr Longhurst was also asked whether he had "informed Mr Yeates of the deficiency in the weight of the flints of which he now complained or of his intention of calling this meeting. "Mr Longhurst's answer was in the negative. He opened his statement by saying "when I thought about the flints about which this meeting is called I went and measured them but could not make eight tons, but the flints did not lay level so that I did a great deal by sight or measurement". He recounted how he had tried to get several parishioners "to take out this truck". Eventually he met "Mr H Hoadley in his field carting hay. I asked him to go the next day to carry out some flints; his reply was, he would go the day after. He asked me the quantity; I said 'ten tons'. Then he said, 'it is a different truck to what I carried out before'. He said, 'there was no more than eight tons in that truck'; he said he would offer me a wager there was not over eight tons, he thought not eight tons. "Eventually Mr Longhurst had said to Mr Hoadley 'You are a ratepayer'; he replied, 'Yes', 'and you wish a proof as to the weight of the flints' was my reply to him. 'It is not to my interest,' he said 'that I should complain; it is easier for me to take out eight than ten tons but it is not right for me to send my cattle out to be paid for what I do not do, and so do wrong to the parish'. I said, 'If you will spare your time, I will spare mine. We will hire Tidey's scales and weigh one truck'."

They went to the station and weighed a truck of flints, making it 7 ton, 18cwt 3 qtrs. The following day they weighed another truck there, finding 7 tons 18cwt 1qtr. Mr Hoper having told Mr Longhurst it was advisable to weigh the one remaining truck also as "the greater would be the proof", the latter "went to Mr Hoadley on Saturday evening to know if he would go and weigh one more truck of flints on Monday morning. He said, 'not much to my interest to go there and work all day to fill eight tons of flints at my own cost, then to return 6/= short for the day, less than my neighbours receive'."

At this point in the statement, Mr Yeates objected to its going further and he asked Mr Longhurst some questions:

Mr Y: After we were appointed surveyors did you or did you not ask permission to take the carting?

Mr L: Yes

Mr Y: I asked you who should pay the men?

Mr L: I said you had better; you always did.

Mr Y: Did you ask if you could arrange the carting?

Mr L: Yes

Mr Y: To whom are the flints consigned?

Mr L: To Mr Yeates

Mr Y: Then why take it upon yourself and make this change without consulting me?

Mr L: Because it was more convenient.

Mr Y: What guarantee will you give me that these flints are weighed correct?

Mr L: I have given you the statement.

Mr Y: Whom do you suspect in this matter of the short weight of flints?

Mr L: I do not suspect anyone.

Mr Y: Do you impute anything to me in this matter?

Mr L: No, I do not; I never expected anything wrong of you.

Finally the propriety of this meeting was called in question and it was adjourned until a truck had been weighed on the weigh bridge in Horsham and an official answer given.

24.7.1884 The official weight of a truck of flints was declared at 9 tons 8 cwt. A letter from Mr Hoper called for a "very full independent and searching enquiry into the whole question connected with the delivery of flints in this parish." A motion was put by Mr J L Irish "that this meeting has full confidence in Mr Yeates' integrity and that measures be taken for weighting the flints by the railway company from time to time as the surveyors may deem fit". The motion was carried against an amendment by Mr H Hoadley "that all the flints laying at the side of the road previous to the last meeting from the village to the old toll gate on the Cuckfield road be weighed".

25.3.1885 The Vestry approved a resolution of Mr R Hoper "that an independent competent solicitor be asked to arbitrate by taking evidence on the question of the three trucks of flints" weighed by JL and HH.

25.5.1885 The report of the arbitrator, J G Langham, approved conduct of JL and HH and held that "Mr Yeates had failed in his duty in looking to the interest of the parish, in having paid for more flints than had been delivered". The arbitrator repudiated "any reflection on Mr Yeates' integrity". An amendment was agreed by the Vestry that "Mr Stapley be communicated with and asked to make up the deficiency of flints mentioned in Mr Langham's report".