

## Woodstock Poor Law Union

Under the old Poor Laws every parish had to support its own paupers. This system was replaced in 1834 by a Poor Law Commission with power to unite parishes into Poor Law Unions, with a central workhouse building, and administered by a local Board of Guardians. The parish of Deddington was part of the Woodstock Union, which covered 29 parishes.

Notices by the Woodstock Union appeared in the *Oxford Journal* on an almost weekly basis inviting tenders for various supplies, such as bread, meat and groceries. From time to time tenders were invited from drapers, shoe makers, coal merchants and coffin makers. A notice on 19 June 1858 specified elm coffins. Because of the frequency and repetitive nature of the notices, they are not usually noted in the digest of press references to Deddington.

There were four Deddington nominees on the Board of Guardians, which met at Woodstock on a weekly basis. The Rev. W.C. Risley was an *ex-officio* Guardian.

John Calcutt, Deddington Postmaster and a prominent Nonconformist, became one of the Deddington representatives on the Board of Guardians, and served as chairman of the Union 1859-1861.

There was, however, considerable dissatisfaction in Deddington as to the inconvenience and expense of being part of the Woodstock Union. In 1858 several public meetings were held, and a 'memorial' (petition) was presented to the Central Poor Law Board by a delegation from Deddington, with a view to establishing a new Poor Law Union based at Deddington.

There was particular concern at the distance of Deddington from Woodstock, which was a 10 mile walk each way for those seeking relief. Another bone of contention was the disproportionate expense suffered by Deddington. While the parish contained one-seventh of population, and represented one-tenth of area, of the Union, it paid one-fifth of Union charges (c.£2,000 annually). Neighbouring parishes were not supportive of the idea, however, and the application was refused.

