

# FONTHILL GIFFORD IN THE MID NINETEENTH CENTURY

## Introduction

Fonthill Gifford is a village in Wiltshire, near Hindon and Tisbury. It is best known for a series of mansions which were built there, two of which were destroyed by fire and one of which collapsed. The most famous are Fonthill Splendens, built by William Beckford senior after the previous mansion was destroyed by fire in 1755, and Fonthill Abbey, built by his son, William Beckford junior, which was completed in 1802. The latter was an immense and spectacular building in the style of a gothic abbey. Unfortunately, the contractor did not follow the building specifications for the central tower, which collapsed in 1825, destroying much of the rest of the building.<sup>1</sup> The Marquis of Westminster built another mansion in 1859, as well as the present Church in 1866.

However, this paper is not concerned with the comings and goings of mansions, but with the people who lived in Fonthill Gifford in the middle of the nineteenth century. It consists of firstly, an analysis of the 1851 census, and secondly, the stories of two families, that provide an insight into the lives and conditions of agricultural labourers in Fonthill Gifford around that time.

## PART 1: FONTHILL GIFFORD 1851

### Heads of Household

In 1851, there were 442 people living in Fonthill Gifford. A list of all heads of household is given in Appendix 1. Of the 88 heads of household, the most common surnames were True (9), Hacker (5), Macy (5), Stevens (5), Vincent (5) and Cole (4). More than three quarters of the heads of household were born in Wiltshire, and more than half in Fonthill Gifford itself.

**Table 1: Place of Birth of Heads of Household, Fonthill Gifford, 1851**

Place	Number	%
Fonthill Gifford	50	56.8
Elsewhere in Wiltshire	23	26.1
Elsewhere in England	13	14.7
Other Country*	2	2.2
Total	88	100%

\* Both from Scotland

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<sup>1</sup> Sawyer, Rex, *Nadder, tales of a Wiltshire valley*, 2006, p 48

## Occupations

Table 2 shows the occupations of heads of household in Fonthill Gifford in 1851. It can be seen that the most common occupation, by far, was agricultural labourer.

The next largest category was 'pauper', which was recorded in the occupation column of the census for 10 people (4 men and 6 women). None of these were in the workhouse. Fonthill Gifford was not a big user of Tisbury Union Workhouse, which served it and nearby parishes at this time. In 1851, of 97 inmates, only 2 had been born in Fonthill Gifford: widower Walter Beckett, aged 74, and Mary Ann Burt, aged 24, who was there with her one year old daughter Mary. Mary Ann Burt was the daughter of Thomas Burt, whose story, along with that of his brother William, is told in Part 2 of this paper.

**Table 2: Occupations of Heads of Household, Fonthill Gifford, 1851**

Occupation	Number	%
Ag Lab	40	45.4
Labourer	4	4.5
Gardener	4	4.5
Blacksmith	3	3.4
Carpenter	3	3.4
Shoemaker/ Cordwainer	3	3.4
Policemen	3	3.4
Farmer	2	2.2
Gamekeeper	2	2.2
Other occupation*	11	
Retired etc	3	3.4
Pauper	10	11.3
Total	88	100%

\* One each of baker, barrister, farm bailiff, inn keeper, land agent/surveyor, rector, sawyer, servant, shopkeeper, tailor, and 'gentleman'.

The 'gentleman' was Alfred Morrison, who was resident at the Pavilion, the remaining part of Fonthill Splendens.

The farmers were William Whittle, a farmer of 400 acres, resident at Fonthill Farm, and Jonathan Vincent, farmer of 50 acres, resident at Jerrard House.

The gamekeepers were Noah 'Dograll' and George Turgiss, the latter resident at North Lodge.

The inn keeper was John Tabor of the Beckford Arms.

## Women

There were 12 female heads of household. Table 3 provides information about them. 8 of them were aged 55 or over, with 5 of them being over 60. Nevertheless, 6 (50%) were recorded as having an occupation, 5 as agricultural labourers. One of these was 61 year old Charlotte Macey, whose story is told in Part 2 of this paper.

In addition, 22 out of 64 (34%) wives of heads of household were recorded as having an occupation. 19 of these were agricultural labourers. The other occupations were labourer, school mistress, and midwife. The fact that so many wives were working as agricultural labourers indicates that their husbands' wages were insufficient to support a family.

**Table 3: Women Heads of Household, Fonthill Gifford, 1851**

Name of Head	Year & Place of Birth	Occupation of Head	Others in Household
COMBE Hannah	1784 FG	Pauper	77 year old female lodger, also a pauper
HARRIET Ann	1809 Devon	Pauper	3 sons, eldest age 16 an ag lab, others scholars
LAMBARD Ann	1779 London	Pauper	None
LOVETT Ann	1808 FG	Ag Lab	None
LOVET Cathrine	1794 Yorkshire	Ag Lab	3 sons & 1 grandson all ag labs, daughter pauper, & 4 year old granddau
MACY Alice	1793 FG	Ag Lab	2 sons and 16 year old daughter, all ag labs
MACY Charlotte	1790 FG	Ag Lab	Son, ag lab, married dau and son in law, gardener, and their 4 year old son
SNOOK Phoebe	1828 Sutton Mandefield	Pauper	None
STEVENS Mary	1808 Somerset	Ag Lab	Son & daughter, both ag labs
TRUE Mary	1783 FG	Pauper	Widowed sister & female lodger, both paupers
TURNER Martha	1780 FG	Pauper	Widowed sister, an annuitant, & male lodger, schoolmaster
VINCENT Lucy	1796 Somerset	Blacksmith	Son and son in law, both blacksmiths & married daughter

## Children

Table 4 gives a breakdown of numbers of children aged 7 to 14 by age and sex, showing the numbers of scholars and the numbers with an occupation recorded for each year group. It can be seen that the majority of boys were recorded as scholars up to and including the age of 12, and the majority of girls up to and including the age of 13.

15 children between the ages of 7 and 14 had an occupation recorded, all but 2 as agricultural labourers. Table 5 gives the names of the children, their occupations, and the names of their fathers. The only father with 2 children with occupation recorded in this age group was William Burt, whose story is told in Part 2 of this paper.

**Table 4: Numbers of Children aged 7-14**

Age	Number of Boys	Boy Scholars	Boys with Occupation	Number of Girls	Girl Scholars	Girls with Occupation
Age 7	9	8	1	6	6	0
Age 8	5	4	0	4	3	0
Age 9	11	10	1	10	9	0
Age 10	3	2	1	5	5	0
Age 11	6	3	3	8	7	0
Age 12	5	4	0	6	4	2
Age 13	5	0	3	6	5	0
Age 14	2	1	1	4	1	3

**Table 5: Names of Children aged 7-14 with Occupations recorded**

Name	Age	Occupation	Father's name & year of birth
BURT Henry	14	Ag Lab	BURT William, 1807
BURT Maria	12	Ag Lab	BURT William, 1807
COLE Lewis	13	Gardener	COLE William, 1814
GILBERT Thomas	10	Ag Lab	GILBERT William, 1802
HACKER Alfred	7	Ag Lab	HACKER Charles, 1806
HACKER John	11	Ag Lab	HACKER James, 1801
HACKER Levi	11	Ag Lab	HACKER John, 1811
LOVETT Mary Ann	14	Ag Lab	LOVETT Henry, 1804
MACY Harriot	14	Ag Lab	MACY Nicholas, 1807
MOULD Ellen	14	Ag Lab	MOULD John, 1812
STEVENS Luke	9	Ag Lab	STEVENS Charles, 1813
STEVENS M Ann	12	Ag Lab	STEVENS John, 1808
TRUE George	13	Ag Lab	TRUE John, 1816
TRUE Henry	11	Ag Lab	TRUE Charles, 1820
TRUE Reubin	13	Labourer	TRUE John, 1790

## **PART 2: THE STORIES OF TWO FAMILIES**

### **William Burt (1807-1875)**

William Burt was born in Fonthill Gifford in 1807, son of Thomas and Martha Burt (née Nisbeck). William continued to live in Fonthill Gifford throughout his life, working as an agricultural labourer. The story of William and his family exemplifies the plight of agricultural labourers at that time.

In 1830, the situation was so bad that there were riots of agricultural labourers in many counties in the south of England, protesting about their inadequate wages and the introduction of farm machinery, particularly threshing machines, which threatened their meagre livelihood. On 25<sup>th</sup> November 1830, a riot involving 400 people took place, during which threshing machines were destroyed at Mr Candy's Farm in Fonthill Gifford and at the farms of John Benett, MP, at Pythouse and Linley Farm in Tisbury. (See Appendix 2.)

One of those who faced trial was William Burt's elder brother, Thomas (born 1804). Thomas' statement at the trial shows the difficulties that agricultural labourers were facing at that time in Fonthill Gifford:

“My Lord, I found work very bad in my own parish for the last three years, and having a wife and three children to support, I was glad to go to work wherever I could get it. I had got some work at a place four miles from my house... I was glad to get work, though I could earn only 7s. per week, and it cost me 1s. a week for iron, so that I had only 6s. a week to support five persons.”<sup>2</sup>

Thomas Burt was sentenced to 7 years transportation, and was transported to Tasmania in 1831, leaving behind his wife Ann Burt (née Stevens) and their 3 young children. Meanwhile, Thomas' brother William Burt and wife Harriet (née True) started their family in Fonthill Gifford. Their daughter Jane was born c1831, and by 1840, they had 5 children.

In 1840, William Burt was put in prison for being unable to pay 1s. 3d. poor rate. He had agreed to let the parish officers sell his belongings to raise the money, but they were found to be insufficient to raise 1s. 3d, so he was put in prison until such time as the money was paid. A petition, presented to the House of Commons, about his situation, shows the extent of his poverty:

“Your petitioner begs further to state in your hon. House, that before his imprisonment he was employed as a day labourer in the parish of Fonthill Gifford, at the wages of 9s. per week; that he has a wife and five small children under 10 years of age, who are entirely dependent upon his labour for their subsistence; that out of the said sum of 9s. per week he had to pay 1s. per week for the rent of the house and garden which he occupies; that he and his wife are wretchedly clothed, and that his children are almost destitute, not one of

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<sup>2</sup> The Times, Jan 3, 1831

them having a shoe to their feet. That during the past winter neither himself nor family have had more than half a bellyfull of the coarsest food, and that consequently he found it impossible to pay the poors'-rate charged upon him, without subjecting himself and family to absolute starvation; that he allowed the overseer to distrain for the amount due, who has made oath according to the above precept that the whole of his effects were not deemed sufficient to pay the said rate.”<sup>3</sup> (See Appendix 3)

One way or another, William Burt was released from prison, for by the time of the 1841 census, he was back home with his wife Harriet, daughters Jane, aged 10, Priscilla, 8, Hannah, 6, Maria 2, and son Henry, aged 3.

At the time of the 1841 census, William was working as an agricultural labourer, but none of his children were working, the eldest being just 10. However, by the time of the 1851 census, William and all the children living with him were recorded as agricultural labourers, the children being son Henry aged 14, and daughters Hannah aged 17 and Maria aged 12. The fact that William's 12 year old daughter was employed as an agricultural labourer is an indication that agricultural wages were still very low and that her contribution was necessary to support the family.

By 1861, all William and Harriet's children had grown up and left home, but they now had their grandson Frank Burt, aged 8, living with them. William was employed as a general labourer. In 1871, grandson Frank was still living with them, working as a labourer, as was William, aged 64. They also had a lodger, a common way of supplementing the family income. William died quarter ending March 1875, aged 67.

In 1881, William's widow, Harriet, aged 80, was living with her 'son-in-law' Walter Macey, agricultural labourer (actually the son of Harriet's daughter Priscilla), Walter's wife Kate (wrongly described as Harriet's daughter), and their son Herbert. Harriet's grandson, Frank Burt, was living nearby with his wife and children, working as a general labourer. Harriet Burt died quarter ending March 1889, aged 87.

Although William's brother Thomas, who was transported to Tasmania, was given a free pardon in February 1836, there is no record of him having returned home. A Thomas Burt, born in Wiltshire, whose father's name was Thomas, died in Victoria, Australia, in 1858, aged 53.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Times, April 14, 1840

<sup>4</sup> Chambers, Jill, *Wiltshire Machine Breakers, Vol 2: The Rioters*, 2008, p 184

### **Charlotte Macey (1791-1851)**

Charlotte Macey, née Whitaker, was born in Fonthill Gifford in 1791, daughter of John and Mary Whitaker. In 1809, at the age of 18, Charlotte married 19 year old Samuel Macey. Samuel Macey was also born in Fonthill Gifford in 1790, son of James and Elizabeth Macey (née Lovett).

Charlotte and Samuel Macey had 9 children, all of whom were baptised at Fonthill Gifford – Charlotte (1809), Samuel (1811), James (1813), John (1816), Elizabeth (1818), William (1821), Mary (1824), Ann (1827), and Henry (1830). Samuel junior died in infancy.

Samuel Macey worked as an agricultural labourer and was involved in the riot and destruction of threshing machines which took place on the 25<sup>th</sup> November 1830, in Fonthill Gifford and nearby Tisbury, described above. Samuel was sentenced to 7 years transportation, and was transported to Tasmania in 1831, along with Thomas Burt. They left Portsmouth on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1831 on the convict ship Eliza and arrived in Hobart on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1831.

Charlotte Macey, then aged 40, was left behind to bring up their 8 surviving children, the youngest of whom, Henry, was just a baby. In 1832, Samuel applied for his family to join him in Tasmania, but for whatever reason, they did not go. The journey, in itself, would have been daunting, as well as the reputation of the harsh conditions in Tasmania, or Van Diemen's Land, as it was then called. So they stayed to face rural poverty at home.

In May 1840, a petition was presented to the House of Commons signed by, amongst others, two of Samuel Macey's brothers, James Macey and Nicholas Macey.<sup>5</sup> The petition described the insufficiency of agricultural wages to support families with the basics of life:

“... your petitioners are employed as agricultural labourers at Fonthill Gifford aforesaid, at the wages of 9s per week, which sum is 1s. per week more than is generally paid for labour in this neighbourhood; that each of your petitioners has a wife and five or six children unable to work to support by his labour; that in consequence of the high price of provisions they find it impossible to supply them with a sufficient quantity of barley and potatoes, which your hon. house may easily imagine by dividing the 9s. by 7, the average amount of the number of each family, which will not amount to 2 ½d. per day for each individual to find him in food, raiment, washing, and house-rent, being a sum far less than the cost of keeping a dog.”<sup>6</sup> (See Appendix 4)

The petition also pointed out that the ‘New Poor Law Act’ of 1834 had worsened the situation:

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<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Macey was the grandfather of Percival Macey, whose death in action in WW1 is commemorated on a memorial plaque in Fonthill Gifford Church.

<sup>6</sup> The Times, May 14, 1840

“Your petitioners beg further to state, that previous to the passing of the New Poor Law Act, when bread was at its present price, the overseers would have paid each of your petitioners 3s.6d. per week in addition to the 9s. which he received for wages, making together 12s.6d. per week; consequently the New Poor Act has reduced their income more than one quarter part.”<sup>7</sup> (See Appendix 4)

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 aimed to discourage people from applying for parish relief by only offering relief inside the workhouse, and by making the workhouse an unpleasant place to be. But implementation of the policy varied. Apart from anything else it was expensive to put whole families in the workhouse. The Tisbury Union officers discovered this to their cost, when some labourers called their bluff and started accepting the workhouse, with the result that “there now exists amongst the ratepayers almost as great an anxiety to keep paupers from the workhouse as there formerly existed in those paupers a dread of going there.”<sup>8</sup>

A record of payments made by the Overseers of the Parish of Fonthill Gifford dated December 25<sup>th</sup> 1834 lists Charlotte Macey and 5 children. It specifies Charlotte’s ‘earnings’, which indicates that she was working. In the 1841 census, Charlotte is described as ‘independent’. This may be a euphemism for being in receipt of parish relief, as it is difficult to see what else it could mean in her case. Living with Charlotte in 1841 were her children Mary, Ann and Henry, and also a Maria Macey, aged about 15. It is not clear who Maria is, as relationships are not specified in the 1841 census.

By 1851, Charlotte, now aged 61, was working as an agricultural labourer. Living with her was her son Henry, also an agricultural labourer, her now-married daughter Mary, son-in-law Mark Cole, a gardener, and Mary and Mark’s son, Walter. Charlotte’s eldest daughter, also called Charlotte, was living in a separate household with her husband William Cole (Mark’s brother), also a gardener, and 5 children. Charlotte Macey died quarter ending December 1851.

Although Charlotte’s husband Samuel received a free pardon in 1836, there is no record of him having returned to England until the 1871 census, when he was back in Fonthill Gifford, aged 82, living with his brother, John Macey, aged 78. Despite their age, they were both described as labourers. In the next household were Samuel’s daughter, Charlotte Cole, and her son Lewis, an agricultural labourer. Samuel’s son Henry, wife Sarah, and their children were also still living in Fonthill Gifford.

So although, sadly, Samuel’s wife Charlotte was long dead, at least he had the opportunity of seeing some of his children and grandchildren before he died. Samuel died quarter ending December 1874, aged 86.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Times, May 14, 1840

<sup>8</sup> Letter from ‘A Ratepayer’ of Tisbury to The Times, Jan 8, 1839

<sup>9</sup> Samuel and Charlotte Macey were the 3 x great grandparents of the author of this article.

**APPENDIX 1: HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD, FONTHILL GIFFORD, 1851**

<b>Name of Head</b>	<b>Year &amp; Place of Birth</b>	<b>Occupation of Head</b>	<b>Working Wife?</b>	<b>Working Child under 15?</b>
ALDRIDGE Edward	1785 E. Tisbury	Pauper	No	N/A
BARRATT William	1804 FG	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	No
BENNET John	1813 Middlesex	Tailor	No	No
BISHOP Amos	1801 Stower Herd	Blacksmith	No	No
BURT William	1807 FG	Ag Lab	No	2 Ag Labs, m age 14, fem age 12
CAINS Cornelius	1822 Berwick	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	No
CRICKWAY? John	1827 Hindon	Journeyman Carpenter	No	No
COLE Job	1785 FG	Gardener Emp 4 Labourers	N/A	N/A
COLE Luke	1823 FG	Gardener	No	No
COLE Mark	1826 FG	Gardener	No	No
COLE William	1814 FG	Gardener	No	Gardener, m age 13
<b>COMBE Hannah</b>	1784 FG	Pauper	N/A	N/A
COMBES James	1815 Wardour	Land Agent & Surveyor	No	No
DOGRALL Noah	1806 Dorset	Game Keeper	No	No
FOX John	1782 Somerset	Shoe Maker	No	N/A
GARRATT Ambrose	1786 Harningham	Independent Barrister	N/A	N/A
GILBERT John	1830 FG	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	No
GILBERT William	1802 FG	Pauper	No	No
GODWIN George	1822 FG	Labourer	Labourer	N/A
GODWIN William	1818 FG	Shop Keeper	No	No
GODWIN William	1820 E. Tisbury	Sawyer	No	No
GRAY Elias	1826 FG	Smith	No	No
GRAY William	1826 FG	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	No
GREGARY Charles	1827 Charlton	Police Officer	No	N/A
HACKER Charles	1806 FG	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	Ag Lab m age 7
HACKER George	1824 Berwick St Leonard	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	No
HACKER James	1801 FG	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	Ag Lab m age 11
HACKER John	1811 F Bishop	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	No
HACKER Lot	1826 Scotland	Ag Lab	No	N/A
<b>HARRIET Ann</b>	1809 Devon	Pauper	N/A	No

HARRIS John	1816 Hampshire	Superintendent of Police	N/A	N/A
HAYTER Joseph	1800 E Tisbury	Ag Lab	No	No
HUNTER John	1810 Scotland	Police Constable	No	No
JAE Thomas	1795 Tisbury	Farm Bailiff	No	No
<b>LAMBARD Ann</b>	1779 London	Pauper	N/A	N/A
LAURANCE John	1797 London	Carpenter	No	No
<b>LOVETT Ann</b>	1808 FG	Ag Lab	N/A	N/A
<b>LOVET Cathrine</b>	1794 Yorkshire	Ag Lab	N/A	No
LOVETT Henry	1804 FG	Ag Lab	No	Ag Lab fem age 14
MACDONALD William	1808 E Knoyle	Cordwainer	No	No
<b>MACY Alice</b>	1793 FG	Ag Lab	N/A	N/A
<b>MACY Charlotte</b>	1790 FG	Ag Lab	N/A	N/A
MACY Nicholas	1807 FG	Ag Lab	No	Ag Lab fem age 14
MACY James	1817 FG	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	No
MACY John	1806 FG	Ag Lab	N/A	N/A
MORRISON Alfred	1822 Kent	Gentleman	N/A	N/A
MOULD John	1812 FG	Ag Lab	No	Ag Lab fem age 14
MOULD? William	1809 FG	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	No
NAIL Henry	1795 FG	Ag Lab	Midwife	N/A
NAIL Henry	1798 FG	Servant of all work	No	No
NAIL Samuel	1791 FG	Pauper	No	No
NEWBERY John	1814 F Bishop	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	N/A
NISBECK William	1819 F Bishop	Ag Lab	School Mistress	No
PERRETT George	1823 FG	Baker	N/A	N/A
PERRETT John	1797 F Bishop	Shoe Maker	N/A	N/A
RADCLIFF William C	1815 St Edmunds Salisbury	Rector	No	No
SANGER William	1796 E Knoyle	Labourer	No	N/A
SMART Charles	1825 FG	Carpenter	No	No
<b>SNOOK Phoebe</b>	1828 Sutton Mandefield	Pauper	N/A	N/A
SNOW James	1799 FG	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	N/A
SPENCER Richard	1779 FG	Surgeon in Army on ½ pay, FRCS, not practising	N/A	N/A
STEVENS Charles	1813 FG	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	Ag Lab

				m age 9
STEVENS John	1808 FG	Ag Lab	No	Ag Lab fem age 12
<b>STEVENS Mary</b>	1808 Somerset	Ag Lab	N/A	N/A
STEVENS Thomas	1806 F Bishop	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	No
STEVENS William	1809 FG	Pensioner ret Ag Lab	N/A	N/A
TABOR John	1827 FG	Inn Keeper Beckford Arms	No	N/A
THICK Mark	1797 Tisbury	Labourer Dealer	No	N/A
TRUE Charles	1820 FG	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	Ag Lab m age 11
TRUE George	1829 FG	Ag Lab	No	N/A
TRUE James	1798 F Bishop	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	No
TRUE James	1811 FG	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	No
TRUE John	1790 FG	Labourer	No	Labourer m age 13
TRUE John	1816 FG	Ag Lab	No	Ag Lab m age 13
TRUE John	1822 FG	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	No
<b>TRUE Mary</b>	1783 FG	Pauper	N/A	N/A
TRUE William	1813 FG	Ag Lab	No	No
TURGISS George	1817 Hampshire	Game Keeper	No	No
<b>TURNER Martha</b>	1780 FG	Pauper	N/A	N/A
TURNER William	1818 FG	Ag Lab	No	No
VINCENT John	1790 FG	Ag Lab	Ag Lab	No
VINCENT Jonathan	1790 FG	Farmer of 50 Acres employing 2 labs	No	N/A
<b>VINCENT Lucy</b>	1796 Somerset	Blacksmith	N/A	N/A
VINCENT William	1826 F Bishop	Ag Lab	N/A	N/A
VINCENT William	1817 FG	Ag Lab	No	No
WHITTLE William	1821 Somerset	Farmer of 400 Acres empl labs	No	No
WIGMORE George	1799 E Knoyle	declined from Agric ???	N/A	N/A
WISE Thomas	1805 FG	Pauper	N/A	No

## APPENDIX 2: EXTRACT FROM THE TIMES, JAN 3, 1831:

SALISBURY, SATURDAY, JANUARY 1.

...The Calendar here is very heavy. There are upwards of 360 prisoners for trial; of these, nearly 9 out of 12 are charged with the destruction of machinery, chiefly thrashing and other machines used in agriculture...

### ATTACK ON JOHN BENETT, ESQ.

The following 17 individuals were then placed at the bar:-

*James Blandford*, aged 28, *Samuel Barrett*, 30, *R. Pitman*, 29, *James Mould*, of Tisbury, 23, *Samuel Banstone*, 41, *Thomas Vining*, 19, *James Mould*, of Hatch, 39, *Thomas Topp*, 20, *Samuel Eyres*, 30, *Thomas Rixen*, 45, *Edmund White*, 20, *John Barrett*, 24, *Charles Jerrard*, 20, *William Snook*, 22, *Thomas Birt*, *John Targett*, and *Andrew Moxam*, 23. They were charged with having riotously and tumultuously assembled, and broke and destroyed the thrashing machine of John Benett, Esq., at Pythouse-farm, in the parish of Tisbury, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November last. There were counts in the indictment charging them with having begun to destroy the said machine, and others charging them with having damaged it, with intent to render it useless. The prisoners all pleaded "not guilty."

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL, in addressing the jury, informed them that the case which he was then going to submit to their consideration, was one which involved no difficulty, either as to its importance or to the guilt of the prisoners. After pointing out the absurdity of the notion that machinery, which facilitated the means of procuring subsistence, could be injurious to the lower classes, and after dilating on the necessity of protecting machinery from the infatuated violence of those who considered it detrimental to the interests of those who lived by manual labour, the Attorney-General proceeded to observe, that the 17 prisoners then at the bar formed but a small part of a numerous crowd which assembled near Hindon, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of last November, and which, after its assembly, proceeded to acts of outrage and cruelty, which would necessarily come in evidence before them, though they were not connected with the subject matter of the present indictment. The jury was aware that Mr. John Benett, their respected and respectable representative, was a gentleman who cultivated his land with great care. It would appear from the evidence which it would be his duty to lay before them, that Mr. Benett having received information in London of events which were going to take place in this county, thought it right to leave London, and to return to Pyt-house, in this county, where he conceived his influence might be more successfully exerted for the maintenance of the public peace. He arrived at his seat, at Pyt-house, at 4 o'clock of the morning of Wednesday, the 24<sup>th</sup> of November. At 8 o'clock he was called up by the information that a riotous and tumultuous mob was assembling in his neighbourhood. He went out in consequence, and found large numbers of labourers assembling. He addressed them on the subject of their alleged grievances, and in reply they told him, without reserve, that they were going to destroy all the thrashing-machines in that neighbourhood. Mr Benett, with great kindness and consideration, warned them of the consequences of the offences which they were going to commit; but despite of his warnings, they proceeded first to

Fonthill-Giffard, and afterwards returned to Pyt-house farm to execute their blind vengeance on machinery. On their return to accomplish that object, he again remonstrated with them upon the impolicy and wickedness of their conduct. He told them that he would have resisted them to the teeth had he had sufficient force to render the chance of successful resistance probable; but he added, that as he had no force capable of withstanding their violence at that moment, armed as they were with sticks, and bludgeons, and iron fragments of machinery, he should not make a vain attempt at resistance, but should leave them at their own peril to enter upon his premises and destroy his machinery. Undeterred by this notice, they proceeded to break to pieces all the thrashing machinery which they found upon Mr Benett's premises. Whilst they were busily engaged in this work of destruction, Mr Benett, who had ridden into the midst of the rioters, suddenly received a volley of stones in his face, which covered him instantly with blood, and were very likely to have produced his death. Fortunately for the prisoners, that result did not follow; for if it had, every person who had then been in the mob must have answered with his life for the life which would then have been lost. It would be necessary for him to give evidence of that outrage upon this trial, in order to show the common object with which these rioters were assembled. It was not for the more serious part of the offence which was then committed, that the prisoners of the bar would now be called to answer, yet it was probable that the riot, in which all these prisoners had joined, would be made the subject of further investigation, if not with regard to the prisoners then before the jury, at least with regard to such members of the mob as had been more riotously and criminally engaged. The Attorney-General then proceeded to call his witnesses to support this indictment...

...John Benett, M.P., examined by Mr. Serjeant WILDE, - I reside at Pyt-house, in the parish of Tisbury. I was in the county of Wilts on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November. In consequence of information which I received, I left my house about 9 or 10 o'clock in the morning of that day. I rode out and met upwards of 400 persons coming from the town of Hindon at a limekiln in Fonthill Gifford...The mob passed me in three divisions. I spoke to each of them. When they passed me, I followed them. They stopped at Mr. Candy's farm, in Fonthill Giffard. They rushed into a blacksmith's shop; but before that, I saw them break Mr. Candy's thrashing-machine to pieces. I rode alongside the mob for a mile and a half, until they came to Mr. Lampert's house, at Lawn-farm. In consequence of something that occurred there, I went to my own premises at Pyt-house-farm. The mob, consisting of 500 persons, afterwards came to me there...

...Mr Baron Vaughan then proceeded to sum up, and, after pointing out the state of the law as applying to this offence, - which, after the many trials of the kind we have given at Winchester, it is unnecessary to repeat here, - detailed the evidence as it applied to each prisoner; calling on the jury, as he concluded the evidence applying to each successively, to consider the case of that prisoner before he went further.

At the conclusion the Jury returned their verdict, finding White and Moxam Not Guilty and all the other prisoners Guilty. On inquiry it was found that they were all agricultural labourers, except White, who is a blacksmith, Rixen, who is a carter, and Birt, who is a sawyer. (Prisoner denied this in very strong terms.)

**APPENDIX 3: EXTRACT FROM THE TIMES, APRIL 14, 1840:**

Mr. T. DUNCOMBE presented a petition from William Burt, complaining of imprisonment for non-payment of 1s.3d. poor-rate.

The petition was as follows:-

“TO THE HON. THE KNIGHTS, CITIZENS, AND BURGESSES OF THE COMMONS HOUSE IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED.

“The humble petition of William Burt, late of the parish of Fonthill Gifford, in the county of Wilts, but now a prisoner in Her Majesty’s gaol at Fisherton, in the said county,

“Showeth, - That your petitioner has been sent to the said gaol for an unlimited period, on account of his being too poor to pay the amount of a parochial assessment charged upon him by virtue of a precept, of which the following is a copy, and the signatures to which are the names of the chairman and vice-chairman of the Tisbury board of guardians:-

“Wilts to wit.-To all constables, tithingmen, and others, Her Majesty’s officers of the peace in and for the said county, whom these presents may concern, any or either of them, to take and to convey, and the keeper of the gaol at Fisherton in the said county to receive.

“We send you the body of William Burt, of Fonthill Gifford, in the said county, labourer, who was this day charged before us, two of Her Majesty’s justices of the peace acting in and for the said county of Wilts, and charged on the oath of James Turner, one of the overseers of the poor of the parish of Fonthill Gifford, in the said county, with having refused to pay the sum of 1s.3d., duly rated and assessed on him in respect of a house and garden in his occupation in the said parish of Fonthill Gifford, for and towards the necessary relief of the poor thereof.

“And whereas it duly appears to us, as well upon the oath of the said James Turner as otherwise, that he the said James Turner has used his best endeavours to levy the said sum of 1s.3d. on the goods and chattels of him the said William Burt, in pursuance of our warrant, but that no sufficient distress can be had whereon to levy the same.

“These are, therefore, in Her Majesty’s name, to will and require you, the said constables, tithingmen, or other officers to whom this warrant is directed, some or one of you, forthwith to take and safely convey the said William Burt to the gaol aforesaid, and there to deliver him to the keeper thereof, together with this precept. And we do also hereby command you, the said keeper, to receive the said William Burt into your custody in the said gaol, and him therein safely to keep, without bail or mainprize, until payment of the said sum of 1s.3d., unless he shall sooner be from thence discharged according to law. Given under our hands and seals the 1<sup>st</sup> day of April, in the year of our Lord, 1840.

“THOMAS GROVE, JUN.,

“CHARLES WYNDHAM’

“Your petitioner begs further to state in your hon. House, that before his imprisonment he was employed as a day labourer in the parish of Fonthill Gifford, at the wages of 9s. per week; that he has a wife and five small children under 10 years of age, who are entirely dependent upon his labour for their subsistence; that out of the said sum of 9s. per week he had to pay 1s. per week for the rent of the house and garden which he occupies; that he and his wife are wretchedly clothed, and that his children are almost destitute, not one of them having a shoe to their feet. That during the past winter neither himself nor family have had more than half a bellyfull of the coarsest food, and that consequently he found it impossible to pay the poors’-rate charged upon him, without subjecting himself and family to absolute starvation; that he allowed the overseer to distrain for the amount due, who has made oath according to the above precept that the whole of his effects were not deemed sufficient to pay the said rate.

“That your petitioner left his late dwelling on the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup> of April, for the purpose of proceeding to his work, when he was seized by the constable of Fonthill Gifford, and conveyed, like a felon, to the county gaol, at which place he is to remain, without bail or mainprize, until the amount of the aforesaid rate is paid.

“Your petitioner begs further to assure your hon. house, that he never before heard, or even read in the Bible, or was ever instructed by the parson of the parish, that it was a crime to be poor, much less that he was liable to imprisonment for being so; that he always understood that poor laws were made for the relief of the destitute, and not for the purpose of imprisoning them for their being unable to pay towards the support of officers of poor-law unions, and that he never considered it to be his duty to pay poor-rates for that purpose, when the consequence would have been the starvation of himself and his family.

“Your petitioner therefore humbly prays your hon. house to take into consideration his most pitiful condition, and to take such measures in his behalf as shall procure his discharge from prison.

“And your petitioner will ever pray.

“WILLIAM BURT”

**APPENDIX 4: EXTRACT FROM THE TIMES, May 14, 1840:**

Mr. T. DUNCOMBE next presented a petition from certain labourers of Fonthill Gifford, in the county of Wilts, which was as follows:-

“TO THE HON. THE COMMONS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED.

“The humble petition of the undersigned labourers of the parish of Fonthill Gifford, in the county of Wilts,

“Showeth, - That your petitioners are employed as agricultural labourers at Fonthill Gifford aforesaid, at the wages of 9s per week, which sum is 1s. per week more than is generally paid for labour in this neighbourhood; that each of your petitioners has a wife and five or six children unable to work to support by his labour; that in consequence of the high price of provisions they find it impossible to supply them with a sufficient quantity of barley and potatoes, which your hon. house may easily imagine by dividing the 9s. by 7, the average amount of the number of each family, which will not amount to 2 ½d. per day for each individual to find him in food, raiment, washing, and house-rent, being a sum far less than the cost of keeping a dog.

“Your petitioners at the time of the passing of the New Poor Law Act were falsely told that the measure was designed to make the labourers better off, and that it would certainly enhance the value of their labour, by their getting higher wages. This your petitioners, in their then state of ignorance, believed to be true; but since that time your petitioners have had an opportunity, through the benevolence of an amiable clergyman now in heaven, to learn to read, by which means they are now enabled to know a ‘hawk from a handsaw,’ and consequently they perceive that the very tendency of that act was to lower the price of labour – for this reason, there are more labourers than are wanted, and, as a natural consequence, some of them cannot be employed; therefore the single men when out of employ will offer their labour at three, four, and five shillings per week rather than go into the workhouse, which has the effect of lowering the general rate of wages, so sure as night follows the setting of the sun.

“Your petitioners beg further to state, that previous to the passing of the New Poor Law Act, when bread was at its present price, the overseers would have paid each of your petitioners 3s.6d. per week in addition to the 9s. which he received for wages, making together 12s.6d. per week; consequently the New Poor Act has reduced their income more than one quarter part.

“Your petitioners would not have troubled your hon. house at this time had they not been alarmed at hearing that the overseers of Fonthill Gifford had obtained warrants to distrain upon the few remaining articles of furniture which they possess, owing to their inability to pay a poor-rate charged upon the cottages which they rent.

“Your petitioners therefore humbly pray your hon. house to immediately repeal that act, commonly known as the New Poor Law Act.

“And your petitioners will ever pray.

“NICHOLAS MACEY

“HENRY LOVETT

“WILLIAM GILBERT

“SAMUEL NEIL

“JAMES MACEY

“JOHN HACKER”