

Toddington Relief Committee 1921-1926

LORNA ROLLINGS

Those who survived the slaughter of the First World War were told by politicians they would come home to a 'Land Fit for Heroes'. This was not to be; many succumbed to the virulent 'flu epidemic in 1918 and the Government of the day (a Coalition led by David Lloyd-George) did little to create jobs for returning soldiers.

By 1921 there were a million or so unemployed, a third of whom were ex-servicemen, and the situation worsened in the Spring of that year when the coal-miners came out on strike. In June some concerned Toddington residents met to decide if anything could be done to give relief to those in the parish suffering hardship. Local organisations were invited to send representatives to a meeting and by 23 June 1921 a Committee had been appointed and agreed to the formation of a Local Relief Fund. All interested organisations were asked to combine and to contribute as large an amount as possible to a fund administered by an advisory Committee and distributed to those seeking relief. The Committee included representatives of the Parish Council (Mr Hickenbotham, Chairman, and Mr Walters the Clerk), the Church of England (the Rector, Canon Hicks, and

Record of the meeting proposing the setting up of the Toddington Relief Committee.

1. A meeting was held in the Town Hall on Wednesday June 8th 1921 for the purpose of ascertaining whether the various organisations in Toddington which take an active interest in the question of relief will agree to a scheme for the formation of one Central Fund and one Representative Administering Committee.

Present. 2. The following were present as representatives of the various organisations concerned :-

The Parish Council Mr Hickenbotham (Chairman) and Walters (Clerk)

Church of England The Rector and Mr. A.T. Bradshaw.

Wesleyan Methodists The Rev. J. W. Utley.

Comrades of the great war Mr. Fawcett, D.S.O., Commandant, with members of the Committee.

Comrades of the great war: Ladies Section Mr. Fawcett, Commandant, with members of the Committee.

L.B.S. Manual National Unorganised Union of labour Mr. J. Chapman (Chairman) with members of the Committee.

Chairman 3. It was proposed by Mr Hickenbotham and seconded by Mr Walters and carried that the Rector be Chairman for the evening.

Churchwarden Mr A T Bradshaw), the Wesleyan Methodists (Revd J W Utley), the Comrades of the Great War (Dr Fawcett DSO) and, from the Comrades Ladies Committee, Mrs Fawcett. Mr J Chapman represented the 263 Branch of the National Amalgamated Union of Labour. Canon Hicks was elected Chairman, with Mr Utley as Vice-Chairman, and each organisation was asked to appoint three members to the Committee, which would meet weekly on Monday evenings in the Town Hall to consider cases for relief. The Ladies Section of the Comrades of the Great War was asked to serve as an Advisory Committee to the Relief Committee.

Cases requiring relief were to be reported to the Ladies Committee and investigated and the details passed to the Secretary of the main Committee for consideration. Those applying for relief had to give details of the reason for the application (sickness, unemployment, etc) and state any other income such as government unemployment pay, money earned by other members of the household, Benevolent Society payouts, help from Trades Unions and so on. Urgent cases were submitted immediately to Mrs Fawcett or the Secretary who could consult and issue the order for relief. It was hoped that in most cases relief could be given in kind (food, clothing, fuel) rather than in cash, the tradesman the applicant usually dealt with to be given the order for relief goods, otherwise the village shops were to be used in turn. The scheme was to be tried for six months then a public meeting held and the situation reviewed.

<p><i>Enquiries were made about the possibilities of employment on relief work for unemployed men in the village.</i></p>	<p><i>Relief Work on this subject.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Chalk Hill</u>: It was agreed that the Secretary should write to the County Council stating that the Committee does not consider Chalk Hill too far off for Tordington men to be employed there, and asking that an opportunity should be given them of applying for this work. 2. <u>Water-ways</u>: It was agreed that as soon as Mr Bird had completed his enquiries the Resolution passed at the meeting held on Dec. 4th about Water-ways should be forwarded with signatures of landowners and tenants of land to the County Council. 3. <u>Dangerous corners</u>: It was agreed that we inform the County Surveyor that Mr Bird is with, that the dangerous corner on his land in the middle of Chalken village is altered; and that we are making enquiries about four other dangerous corners, about which we will write to him later. 4. <u>Midland Railway</u>: The Chairman reported that he had been in communication with officials of the Midland Railway, who had themselves heard nothing of the widening of the line in this district; and that he was in further communication with the Company on the subject.
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forthcoming from the National Health Commissioners. The County Council was asked to supply free milk for tubercular patients and the Board of Guardians to implement the Provision of Meals for School Children Act.

One parishioner in particular caused the Committee a great deal of concern. His daughter was about to enter an institution in Bedford; he was already paying 6s a week for her maintenance, but the home required a bond to be signed guaranteeing that the payment would continue once the girl was admitted. Mrs Fawcett was willing to sign the bond, but it was thought an approach should first be made to the girl's aunt to see if she could take on the responsibility. Two of this man's sons were in a National Children's Home which had promised to care for them for another 12 months, but two other sons were in a home for waifs and strays and their father had not contributed anything for their support. A Committee member agreed to try and induce the father to give at least a shilling a week to the home. The Rector (now the Rev Skelton) said he would rather pay £5 towards the boys' maintenance than have them returned to the care of their father, and the Committee agreed to give one guinea of this £5. In desperation the Committee decided to write to all publicans in Toddington asking them not to serve the man with drink, hoping that he would mend his ways and face up to his responsibilities.

The Committee continued its work during 1923 and 1924, although less help was given. At first the Committee had sought out cases they felt needed relief but they were not so keen to do this in ensuing years. There had been criticism that undeserving families had been helped, and a general reluctance of parishioners to come forward and ask for relief. The British Legion had been formed and was able to help ex-servicemen on a national basis. There was difficulty in raising funds but permission was given for a collection box to be placed in the Sundon Cement Works on pay days, and Committee member Mr J B Hyde collected the proceeds from the cashier every week. A Public Meeting was held in October 1925 and it was reported that there were fewer unemployed, but also a lack of funds. Two hundred and twenty nine payments had been made, £68 10s 2d paid out – leaving a balance of 16s 4d.

In February 1926 an Annual Public Meeting was held, and it was reported that there was only £4 15s 1d in the funds. Because of the small attendance at this meeting officers could not be appointed, so it was agreed that a further meeting be held in March to vote on the resolution 'That this meeting recommends that the business of the Toddington Central Relief Committee should be wound up and its activities terminated forthwith'. It was carried unanimously at the final meeting on 15 March 1926, the balance of the funds to be distributed at the Committee's discretion.

Of the members of the Committee, Canon Hicks later became Bishop of Lincoln and made a Deed of Gift of the Toddington Green and Town Hall to the village. Mr J B Hyde was the father of the present Parish Council Chairman, Councillor Bernard (Bim) Hyde MBE. Mr Fletcher was the uncle of another present-day parish councillor, Harold Fletcher, the well-known local milkman. Parishioners still remember, and speak warmly of, Dr and Mrs Fawcett, and their daughter, Patricia.

Lorna Rollings has lived in Bedfordshire all her life, in Toddington since 1975. She has been assistant to the Parish Clerk since 1982. This article is based on extracts from the Minute book of the Relief Committee, found among parish records during the move of the Parish Office into the new Village Hall.