

The land agent and the old poor laws: examining the correspondence of William Spencer in Sapcote, Leicestershire*

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Abstract

Limited research has been conducted on the ways in which land agents were involved in the administration and management of poor relief on estates. Literature on the old poor laws has focused on the individuals vested with powers under law to administer poor relief (such as parish officers and magistrates) and literature on land agents has overlooked this role. In order to address this deficiency, this article examines the richly detailed correspondence of William Spencer, who worked in Leicestershire for John Frewen Turner, and his role in the implementation of a deterrent workhouse system in the early nineteenth century. Spencer directed the establishment of the new institution, negotiated between the landowner and key individuals in the community, and gleaned information about poor relief practices in other locations. Spencer also held prejudices against individuals in the community, and reported their resistance to the new workhouse. This case study illustrates some of the ways in which land agents influenced and managed poor relief system in nineteenth-century rural England.

On 1 February 1829, the major landowner John Frewen Turner died aged 73. The *Leicestershire Chronicle* reported that he was ‘greatly beloved and lamented’, a ‘true old English Gentleman, being the sincere christian [sic], the faithful friend, the parent of his tenantry, and the benefactor of the distressed, and poor’.¹ But the poor were not always at the forefront of his mind. In 1806 Frewen Turner had to be encouraged by his land agent, William Spencer, to attend the opening of a new workhouse in Sapcote in Leicestershire.² Like so many absentee landowners of the era, Frewen Turner’s land was left in the hands of a land agent who was partly responsible for the relief of the poor enshrined in the old poor laws – laws established and developed from the Elizabethan era, until the centralized New Poor Law was implemented from 1834. But despite the prevalence of this arrangement, how land agents negotiated, managed and established poor relief policies and practices, especially in the modern era, has been under-researched.

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¹ *Leicester Chronicle*, 7 February 1829.

² 17 Mar. 1806, Spencer to Frewen Turner (Cold Overton [hereafter CO]), The Keep FRE/9075.

This article provides a micro-history of the management of poor relief in one rural estate in England by one land agent.³ Its purpose is to demonstrate the ways in which land agents could help landowners establish new poor relief regimes, especially institutional relief, in the final decades of the old poor laws, years when poverty was increasing dramatically. It does this by examining over 50 letters sent by William Spencer to Frewen Turner over an eight-year period, from 1804 to 1811, alongside surviving parish records.⁴ This correspondence provides numerous and rich details about Spencer's involvement in the establishment of a new workhouse. As Andy Wood has recently stressed, scrutinizing local records such as estate papers and correspondence relating to one place and one community enables us to 'reveal something of wider social structures, sensibilities and understandings'.⁵ Following this same micro-historical approach, this paper provides an examination of Spencer's letters according to four main themes, each one focusing on an aspect of Spencer's poor law work. Firstly, the establishment of a large, purpose-built deterrent workhouse so that indoor, rather than outdoor, relief could be administered. The second theme examines Spencer's relationships with those administrators involved in the provision of poor relief, especially the members of the workhouse committee and local magistrates. The third section will outline Spencer's role in researching other practices of relief, and how he used knowledge drawn from a range of locations to manage the workhouse. The final theme focuses the lens on Spencer's prejudices towards individuals as well as the labouring poor and, in turn, how the labouring poor resisted the new workhouse. Land agents could, as this case study shows, establish, manage, research, and defend the use of deterrent workhouses on rural estates.

To begin it is necessary to provide an overview of the relevant poor law historiography, demonstrating that our understanding of land agents' involvement in the provision of poor relief lacks significant detail. The second section provides a contextual sketch, including Spencer's employment, the nature of poor relief and the workhouse at Sapcote. The article then explores the four themes outlined above before drawing conclusions. It will be argued that the findings presented here suggest the importance of undertaking further micro-historical case studies to reveal more about the role of land agents in the administration of poor relief under the old poor laws.

I

The landowner had significant power over the welfare of the labouring poor in England into the early nineteenth century. In a 1972 article in the *Review*, Holderness argued that 'close' parishes – parishes where the land was in hands of one or a few people – were 'rigidly controlled by landlords and ratepayers'. In particular, and of most concern to Victorian policy-makers, was the restriction of cottage-building. The agricultural labourer in these parishes

³ This paper adopts the more modern term 'agent' as in other recent research on the subject.

⁴ All letters referred to are in series FRE are in The Keep [hereafter TK]; all parish level records are from the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Record Office

[hereafter LLRRO].

⁵ A. Wood, 'Afterword: small places, big questions: reintegrating social and economic history, c. 1350–1750', in J. P. Bowen and A. T. Brown, *Custom and commercialisation in English rural society* (2016), p. 251.

often walked considerable distances to and from work, and people regularly had to move out to the overcrowded housing in 'open' parishes.⁶ The landlord's aim was to control the number of families they had to employ, and of course, the number of individuals 'chargeable' on the parish rates for poor relief. While the number and density of 'close' parishes across England varied according to region, Holderness noted that they were particularly prevalent in the 'light soil uplands' of the Cotswolds, Norfolk, the East Midlands and East Riding.⁷ In this regard landowners, especially in these regions, have been placed under significant scrutiny. Beatrice and Sidney Webb's seminal volume on the old poor laws (1922) pointed to the forcible removal of the poor from estate land and, by the early nineteenth century, the authority exercised by landowners over the way relief was provided.⁸ For instance, in 1830 Uley, Gloucestershire, the landowner and magistrate J. H. Lloyd Baker was inspired to develop a deterrent workhouse regime implemented in Southwell, Nottinghamshire.⁹ Baker put the workhouse 'practically into his own management, drew up strict rules as to regimen, and refused Outdoor Relief to any able-bodied Labourer'.¹⁰ The 'rigorous application of the poor law' in tightly held parishes could force the labourer from the land.¹¹

Of course, we know that many parishes could not be 'so tidily classified', as Brundage puts it, into 'open' and 'close' categories and also that many landowners and their tenant farmers were not necessarily focused on controlling the population or reducing the poor rates. A 'strong paternalistic commitment', he argues, continued amongst the propertied classes. Anne Digby's research on Norfolk highlighted the continuing humanitarianism within the propertied classes towards the poor within their estates. Indeed, in this county a series of Local Acts were created in the 1770s, permitting parishes to unite (into an 'Incorporation') in order to provide workhouses for the more vulnerable poor. In most of these institutions the able-bodied poor were employed in some form of work, but the vulnerable poor were looked after too. At Rollesby, for instance, the 'needs of all kinds of poor people were liberally provided for'.¹² The passage of Gilbert's Act in 1782 (Geo. III c.83) saved parishes the expense of passing such legislation. Gilbert's Act was solely meant to be for the creation of a workhouse for the accommodation of the vulnerable poor such as the unwell, older people and children. This 'enabling Act' was taken up by the Norfolk parishes enthusiastically, so that by 1834, one in ten parishes were in a Gilbert's Union, and one in four were in a Local Act incorporation.¹³ In West Sussex, two workhouses were established under Gilbert's Act by Lord Egremont, and many other neighbouring parishes soon unionized to conform to the ideal.¹⁴ The wax seal

⁶ B. A. Holderness, 'Open' and 'close' parishes in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *AgHR* 20 (1972), pp. 126–39, quote from p. 126.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁸ S. Webb and B. Webb, *English poor law history, part 1: the old poor law* (1922), p. 320.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 256–58; see also J. D. Marshall, 'The Nottinghamshire reformers and their contribution to the New Poor Law', *EcHR* 13 (1961), pp. 382–96.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

¹¹ Reading of A. Charlesworth 'The development of the English rural proletariat and social protest,

1700–1850: a comment', *J. Peasant Studies* 8 (1980), pp. 101–11 by R. Wells, 'Social conflict and protest in the English countryside in the early nineteenth century: a rejoinder', in M. Reed and R. Wells, *Class, conflict and protest in the English countryside, 1700–1880* (1990), p. 67.

¹² A. Digby, *Pauper palaces* (1978), p. 37.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 32; for Suffolk see J. Shaw, *The Loes and Wilford Poor Law Incorporation, 1765–1826: 'A prison with a milder name'* (2019), pp. xi–xviii.

¹⁴ S. A. Shave, *Pauper policies: poor law practice in England, 1780–1850* (2017), pp. 56–110.

stamped on the correspondence from one of these institutions captured that initial paternalist sentiment well: 'Goodwill towards men'.¹⁵ Dunkley has shown how fragile and faint that paternalism had become by the early nineteenth century, however.¹⁶ Increasing poor relief costs were dealt with through a series of punitive outdoor relief schemes, reductions in the scale and scope of relief, and policies to make workhouses places of last resort rather than care. Such measures, some legitimized though statutory acts, eroded rural societal stability.¹⁷ No wonder landowners' property was targeted during the 1830–31 Swing Riots.¹⁸

The influence of the propertied class over poor relief prior to 1834 is very apparent in the historiography, yet what is remarkable is how rarely the landowner's employee, the land agent, is discussed.¹⁹ Land agents do not appear in the work of the Webbs, and are also absent from key works on the poor laws. Previously, in *Pauper Policies*, I used the example of William Tyler, the land agent for Lord Egremont's estate, to suggest that land agents could be heavily involved in the development and management of relief regimes. Indeed, by piecing together a wide range of administrative documents, it has been shown that Tyler acted as a clerk for the workhouse committees, and undertook a variety of other important tasks, such as advertising for prospective workhouse contractors and reviewing their applications. Tyler was 'pivotal' in development and administration of welfare reforms in this expanse of 'close' Sussex parishes.²⁰ How other land agents were involved in the administration of poor relief has not been studied by poor law historians. The position and other responsibilities of land agents within rural society have, however, been addressed in literature specifically focused on land agents, to which we now turn.

Challenging the long-held stereotype beloved of popular literature that land agents were terrifying tyrants, a wave of new research has foregrounded their positive attributes and achievements. Sarah Webster's work, for instance, has focused on land agents' contribution to agricultural innovation and the diversity in management styles and gradual professionalization of agents on Lord Egremont's estate.²¹ James Bowen has explored the role of chief agent James Loch in improving the Lilleshall Estate owned by the Marquis of Stafford in Shropshire.²² Research has also highlighted the careful relationship between land agents and people working and living on rural estates. Carol Beardmore has analysed the everyday policies and politics of the land agent William Castleman on the Marquis of Anglesey's estate, in Dorset and Somerset.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁶ A. Brundage, *The English poor laws, 1700–1930* (2003), p. 23; P. Dunkley, 'Paternalism, the magistracy and poor relief in England 1795–1834', *International Rev. Social Hist.* 24 (1979), pp. 371–97.

¹⁷ S. A. Shave, 'The impact of Sturges Bourne's poor law reforms in rural England', *Historical Rev.* 56 (2013), pp. 399–429 with Corrigendum, 57 (2014), p. 593; Shave, *Pauper policies*, pp. 111–49.

¹⁸ See C. J. Griffin, *The rural war: Captain Swing and the politics of protest* (2012).

¹⁹ See A. Brundage, 'The landed Interest and the New Poor Law: a reappraisal of the revolution in government', *EHR* 87 (1972), pp. 27–48; P. Dunkley, 'The landed interest and the New Poor Law: a critical note', *EHR* 88 (1973), pp. 836–41; A. Brundage, 'The landed

interest and the New Poor Law: a reply', *EHR* 90 (1975), pp. 347–51; B.K. Song, 'Continuity and change in English rural society: the formation of Poor Law Unions in Oxfordshire', *EHR* 114 (1999), pp. 314–38.

²⁰ Shave, *Pauper policies*, pp. 158–9, quote from p. 158.

²¹ S. Webster, 'Estate improvement and the professionalisation of land agents on the Egremont estates in Sussex and Yorkshire, 1770–1835', *Rural Hist.* 18 (2007), pp. 47–69; id., 'Agents and professionalisation: improvement on the Egremont estates c. 1770–1860' (Unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2011).

²² J. P. Bowen, 'A landscape of improvement: the impact of James Loch, chief agent to the Marquis of Stafford, on the Lilleshall estate, Shropshire', *Midland Hist.* 35 (2010), pp. 191–214.

Agent and tenants were engaged in a carefully orchestrated relationship. She argued that, 'Both understood the responsibilities and duties expected of the other', with 'an unspoken agreement that the landowner would support his tenants during periods of economic downturn'. Beardmore also examined the networks of wealthy individuals Castleman maintained to secure the financial footing of the estate.²³ The character and abilities of several land agents in Scotland, Ireland and Wales have been re-evaluated in a similar spirit.²⁴ These carefully researched case studies present us with a more nuanced and cooperative view of land agents, conducting a tricky 'juggling act' with difficult issues and rural relationships, and crucially as Webster contends, acting 'as mediator' between different social groups.²⁵

Notwithstanding the scale and scope of this recent re-evaluation of the role of land agents, little attention has been given to their involvement in the administration of poor relief. An exception is Beardmore who showed that land agents set and collected poor rates, and at times discouraged the poor from seeking relief. More documentation has survived, however on the organization of small scale charitable donations, such as food, money and fuel, and the setting up of paternalistically motivated self-help schemes beyond statutory control, such as allotments and savings banks.²⁶ Steven King has demonstrated that after 1834 land agents entered into dialogue with the Poor Law Commission on behalf of their employers, and could shape the composition of each unions' board of Guardians.²⁷ In a similar period, the land agent William Scott Owen in Montgomeryshire established a new school and sought to turn a workhouse into a hospital.²⁸

Notably, the lack of prominence given to land agents in the provision of poor relief prior to 1834 is reflected in land agents' handbooks of the time. While some failed to outline the poor laws or the practice of giving poor relief, others instead recommended that the reader refer to generic popular handbooks. John Lawrence's 1801 guide, *The modern land steward*, for instance, referred readers to handbooks popular amongst parish officials and magistrates, such as *The parish laws* or *The universal parish officer*, which went through several editions.²⁹ Instead of detailing poor relief administration, Lawrence emphasized the role of the land agent in finding parishioners work and charitable forms of assistance. Unsurprisingly, these guides largely focus on the management and improvements of lands, buildings, ponds, roads, railways, livestock, flora and fauna.³⁰

²³ C. Beardmore, 'Landowner, tenant and agent on the Marquis of Anglesey's Dorset and Somerset estate, 1814–44', *Rural Hist.* 26 (2015), p. 196; ead., *Financing the landed estate: power, politics and people on the Marquis of Anglesey's estate, 1812–1854* (2019).

²⁴ E.g. L. A. Rees, C. Reilly, and A. Tindley (eds), *The land agent 1700–1920* (2018).

²⁵ First quotation: C. Beardmore, 'The rural estate through the eyes of the land agent: a community in microcosm, c 1812–1844', *Family and Community Hist.* 19 (2016), p. 31; second quotation: Webster, 'Estate Improvement', p. 54.

²⁶ Beardmore, 'Rural estate', pp. 28–30; ead., *Financing the landed estate*, pp. 167–98.

²⁷ S. King, 'The role of the land agent: continuity and

continuity', in C. Beardmore, S. King, and G. Monks (eds), *The land agent in Britain: past, present and future* (2016), p. 147.

²⁸ R. Jones, 'William Scott Owen, 1853–1920: an English-born land agent in mid Wales', *Family and Community Hist.* 21 (2018), pp. 87, 90.

²⁹ J. Lawrence, *The modern land steward, in which the duties and functions of stewardship are considered and explained with their several relations to the interests of the landlord, tenant, and the public* (1801), p. 58.

³⁰ See also G. Jacob, *The complete court-keeper: or, land-steward's assistant* (7th edn, 1781), which only refers to the collection of forfeits to be distributed to the poor, pp. 65–6.

The appeal to further explore the land agent's involvement in the administration of poor relief is a reflection of the changing focus of poor law history in recent years. Poor law historians have been increasingly concerned with the face-to-face and everyday nature of poor relief, those quotidian negotiations between welfare claimant and welfare administrator. Coined as the 'welfare process', by Lyn Hollen Lees and Steve Hindle, this work has often focused on that interaction between claimant and parish overseers, and their assistants, whose responsibility it was to hear cases and allocate poor relief.³¹ This focus reveals something of the 'micro-politics' of poor relief – 'the local negotiations that took place over the allocation of resources between the prosperous and the needy'.³² Many historians have been able to access these negotiations through 'pauper letters': letters written by or for individuals and families asking for relief from their parish of settlement when they were unable to attend the vestry to make the claim in person. Over the last 15 years or so, research into pauper letters has flourished, providing insights into the dynamics of negotiating and petitioning for poor relief, and intimate details about the lives of the poor, their relationships, and communities, as well as their knowledge, power and agency.³³

Hindle noted that the 'welfare process' was broader than the relief claimant and the vestrymen; 'various participants' also included county magistrates.³⁴ Under law, magistrates maintained a 'supervisory' role, ensuring that parish officials were elected fairly and relief was operating within the legislation. Many also listened to appeals against the parish relief decisions, and exercised their powers in overturning them.³⁵ Bedfordshire magistrate and MP, Samuel Whitbread, overturned about two-thirds of the cases he heard, although such a high rate might not have been replicated by others in this role.³⁶ Nevertheless, the magistracy could 'defend' the welfare of the poor; powers noted in pauper letters to urge poor relief to be provided.³⁷

The levels of 'obligation and responsibility', as Hindle puts it, within the 'welfare process' amongst parish officials, magistrates and the poor has received much attention.³⁸ Within this work land agents are largely absent, although notably in Hindle's own work on the early modern period we find a few examples of how they defined and distributed charitable

³¹ L. H. Lees, *The solidarities of strangers: The English poor laws and the people, 1700–1948* (1998), p. 33; S. Hindle, *On the parish? The micro-politics of poor relief in rural England c.1550–1750* (2004), p. 363.

³² Hindle, *On the parish?*, p. 6; For an introduction to the politics of the parish, see K. Wrightson, 'The politics of the parish in early modern England', in P. Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (eds.), *The experience of authority in Early Modern England* (1996), pp. 10–46. Further research with a focus on the micro-politics of poor relief includes: D. Eastwood, 'The republic in the village: the parish and poor at Bampton, 1780–1834', *J. Regional and Local Studies* 12 (1992), pp. 18–28; S. Hindle, 'Power, poor relief, and social relations in Holland Fen, c. 1600–1800', *Historical J.* 41 (1998), pp. 67–96; J. Healey, 'The development of poor relief Lancashire, c. 1598–1680', *Historical J.* 53 (2010), pp. 551–72.

³³ For the most comprehensive volume on pauper letters, see S. King, *Writing the lives of the English poor, 1750s–1830s* (2019).

³⁴ Hindle, *On the parish?*, p. 363.

³⁵ P. Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531–1782* (1990:1995), p. 11; Dunkley, 'Paternalism, the magistracy and poor relief'.

³⁶ P. King, 'The rights of the poor and the role of the law: the impact of pauper appeals to the Summary Courts, 1750–1834', in P. Jones and S. King (eds.), *Obligation, entitlement and dispute under the English Poor Laws* (2015), pp. 235–62; S. Williams, *Poverty, gender and life-cycle under the English Poor Law, 1760–1834* (2011), pp. 93–4.

³⁷ Quote from Hindle, *On the parish?*, p. 406; King, *Writing the lives*, p. 211.

³⁸ Hindle, *On the parish?*, p. 6.

provision and statutory poor relief on estates.³⁹ Arguably however the ‘welfare process’ approach has too narrowly focused on examining the work of individuals who were directly vested with powers to administer poor relief under laws, rather than those individuals without such powers; this includes land agents who, unless they took an official role themselves, have hitherto been perceived as marginal. As literature on the land agent noted above demonstrates, these individuals had ‘a unique position within agrarian society’, being situated – and a point of contact – between the landowner and everyone else in the places they were employed.⁴⁰ The rest of this article will illustrate how entangled and embedded land agents could be within the administration of the old poor law on behalf of the landowner, dealing both with parish and local officials, and those in need of relief. The next section provides context about the case of Spencer: the landowner employing him, Spencer’s multiple roles, and the local poor relief contexts and schemes at Sapcote.

II

Spencer’s employer, John Frewen Turner (born in 1755), inherited parts of Sussex, Leicestershire, and Yorkshire throughout the second half of the eighteenth century from various immediate and extended family.⁴¹ He came to own land in Sapcote in south-west Leicestershire and Cold Overton Hall, a seventeenth-century country house, in the Melton district on the eastern edge of the same county in 1791 on the death of his father, Reverend Thomas Frewen Turner.⁴² The Sapcote land was approximately 1600 acres and under Thomas Frewen Turner’s control it was enclosed in 1778.⁴³ In the same year his son inherited the land, John Frewen (as he was then known) took up the additional surname Turner. He also became a magistrate, the deputy lieutenant-colonel of the yeomanry cavalry, and received the title of High Sheriff of Leicestershire.⁴⁴ Within three years he became a Major of the Leicestershire Yeomanry, and in another three had secured the title of Lieutenant Colonel.⁴⁵ These inheritances and powerful titles would ‘lay the foundations for the rise of one of Leicestershire’s major landowning families in the nineteenth century’.⁴⁶ Frewen Turner became an MP for Athlone (1807–1812) in Ireland as an independent candidate, although it appears that he never spoke in the House.⁴⁷ In 1808 he married Eleanor Clarke, the sister of the intellectual, feminist and Parisian salon host Mary Elizabeth Clarke (later Mohl) who visited Eleanor at Cold Overton Hall from time

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 46, 108, 168, 169.

⁴⁰ Beardmore, ‘Rural estate’, p. 20.

⁴¹ For a full description of the inheritance see P.S. Shipley, ‘A Georgian country gentleman and his world: the diaries of John Frewen Turner of Cold Overton Hall, 1781–1805’, *Trans. Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Soc.* 88 (2014), pp. 114–19.

⁴² B. J. Burke, *A genealogical and heraldic dictionary of the landed gentry in Great Britain & Ireland for 1852* (3 vols, 1852), I, p. 450.

⁴³ J. Monk, *General view of the agriculture of the County of Leicester*, Board of Agriculture (1794), p. 73.

⁴⁴ Burke, *Genealogical and heraldic dictionary*, I, p. 450.

⁴⁵ Ibid.; J. M. Collinge, ‘Frewen Turner, John (1755–1829) of Cold Overton, Leics. and Brickwall, Suss.’, in *Member Biographies*; [online] Available: www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/frewen-turner-john-1755-1829 [accessed 18 June 2020].

⁴⁶ P. S. Shipley, ‘The Leicestershire gentry and its social and cultural networks c. 1790–1875’ (Unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2011), p. 57.

⁴⁷ Hansard 1803–2005, ‘Mr John Frewen-Turner’; [online] Available: api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/people/mr-john-frewen-turner [accessed 4 August 2020].

to time.⁴⁸ Frewen Turner mostly lived in Brickwall House on his Sussex estate in Northiam near Rye, but also spent time in Westminster and Bath. Nevertheless, he was interested in what was happening on his other estates.

It is unclear exactly when Frewen Turner first employed Spencer as a land agent, but it is obvious that the employer valued and respected him. Spencer lived with his wife Mary in the parish of Knossington, adjacent to the parish of Cold Overton. When he died in 1824, aged 51 years, Frewen Turner funded a memorial plaque, to which Mary's name was later added.⁴⁹ This gesture is not surprising given that the agent had a 'status closer to the nobility than the tenant farmer'.⁵⁰ The plaque, erected in Sapcote parish church, pointed towards all the standard qualities of the land agent. He was 'endowed with a scientific mind and firm integrity he was singularly valuable in the duties of his station while his kindness of disposition endeared him to his family'. Like many other land agents of this era, he pushed the estate into new phases of 'improvement' beyond the agriculture of the estate, with plans for new bakehouses, turnpikes and clocks, amongst other things.⁵¹ He took notice of the infrastructure and services within the estate and surrounding areas, such as the time a hurricane in 1811 damaged all of the local windmills and completely demolished one in Hinckley.⁵² He also noted things in his capacities as schoolmaster, constable and churchwarden, such as sparse school attendance, robberies from grocery stores and from individual's houses, and the impregnation of a 'lunatic' by a married man.⁵³ He relayed bad news as well as good. Correspondence was Spencer's way of securing the 'confidence of his employer', as Geoff Monks puts it, so that he could undertake his duties with self-assurance.⁵⁴ There were moments, however, when Spencer wanted more support from Frewen Turner, as will be detailed below.

Spencer also oversaw poor relief matters for Frewen Turner in difficult circumstances. The Midland counties were not immune to the economic depression that caused much destitution and hardship amongst the labouring classes. The £2 million spent on relief in England and Wales in 1783–85 had doubled by 1802–3 and then quadrupled to £8 million by 1818. Cost per head of the population went from 4s. in 1776 to 13s. in 1818.⁵⁵ Leicestershire was providing 14s. per head of the population between 1812–13, 1s. higher than the average across England. Relief costs in the county decreased to 11s. per head by 1822–23, but remained 1s. higher than

⁴⁸ P. Law, 'Mary Clarke and the nineteenth-century salon', *Sydney Studies in English* 11 (1985), p. 62; Collinge, 'Frewen Turner, John'.

⁴⁹ See J. Finlay, 'Tombstone Tuesday: the Spencers of Sapcote', *Finding Family* (blog post, 19 March 2013); [online] Available: findingthefamily.wordpress.com/2013/03/19/tombstone-tuesday-the-spencers-of-sapcote/ [accessed 18 June 2020].

⁵⁰ Beardmore, 'Rural estate', p. 20.

⁵¹ 1 Feb. 1804, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9071; 20 May 1811, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9187; 7 Mar. 1813, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner (6 Green Park Buildings, Bath) TK FRE/9216; 26 Feb. 1811, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9208.

⁵² 30 Oct. 1811, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9216.

⁵³ 26 Feb. 1811, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9209; 7 Mar. 1811, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9209; 5 Oct. 1805, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9061; 21 Feb. 1828 and 21 Apr. 1829, Sapcote Vestry Minute Book 1810–1856, LLRRO DE933/27.

⁵⁴ G. Monks, 'William Gould, land agent and the rural community in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire', *Family and Community Hist.* 21 (2018), p. 68.

⁵⁵ B. Harris, *The origins of the British welfare state: social welfare in England and Wales, 1800–1945* (2004), p. 43.

the national average.⁵⁶ Parishes on the land belonging to Frewen Turner do not feature in the readily available and often digitized poor relief surveys so it is difficult to give more local detail. Fredrick Morton Eden did not tour through this area in the making of his 1797 survey, *The state of the poor*, for instance.⁵⁷ Also, there were no survey returns from these parishes to the Royal Commissions' *Rural queries* in 1832, although perhaps this is not surprising given that just over ten per cent of parishes across England and Wales provided these.⁵⁸ It is worth highlighting that these returns were often completed by parish officers, magistrates, landowners and, occasionally, their land agents. We do know, from the notes Spencer gave on the census of 1811, that the location of the workhouse – the parish of Sapcote – was a small community consisting 120 households, or 127 families, totalling 692 people. The majority of men were employed in the trades rather than agriculture in this particular parish, indicating that it provided a variety of local services.⁵⁹

As outlined above, landowners showed a renewed interest in indoor relief throughout the end of the eighteenth and into the early nineteenth centuries as poor relief costs mounted. In the early 1800s Frewen Turner decided to adopt Gilbert's Act (1782), which enabled him to unite parishes for the provision of poor relief, and establish a central workhouse – in Sapcote – for the accommodation and employment of the poor. The motivations of landowners, as well as parish welfare administrators in general, to adopt this legislation related to both parish economy and the morality of the poor themselves. In the first instance, adopting Gilbert's Act to unite parishes was much cheaper than passing special government-level statutes for an 'Incorporation'. Indeed, Gilbert's Act simply required local-level arrangements to be made: a two-thirds majority in favour of the idea in each parish vestry, and the ratification of two magistrates. Mass incarceration was viewed as economical, by saving on the costs of outdoor relief (such as money or food to top up inadequate or non-existent wages) and the costs of accommodation provided by other means, such as paying the rent or maintaining parish-owned houses and cottages for the poor.⁶⁰ In southern England, the majority of parishes had clearly adopted the Act during years of distress in order to make 'considerable savings', as one parish put it, in the longer term.⁶¹ Indeed, although Thomas Gilbert, the Act's creator, wanted these workhouses to act as refuges for the separate care of vulnerable relief claimants, as discussed above, many were used to accommodate the under- and unemployed able-bodied. Strict work routines were established and contractors were appointed in order to secure profits, and they effectively became the deterrent workhouses we are more used to observing under the New Poor Law.⁶² The use of Gilbert's Act in this way mirrored common outdoor relief practices implemented in the final

⁵⁶ BPP 1824 420, Report from the Select Committee on Poor Rate Returns, p. 11.

⁵⁷ Eden visited Leicester, and two market towns and one rural parish in Leicestershire; F. M. Eden, *The state of the poor* (3 vols, 1797, repr. 2001), ii, pp. 374–89.

⁵⁸ M. Blaug, 'The poor law report re-examined', *J. Economic Hist.*, 24 (1964), p. 234.

⁵⁹ 14 June 1811, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner (CO) TK FRE/9212.

⁶⁰ For more about the provision of parish accommodation see J. Broad, 'Housing the rural poor in southern

England, 1650–1850', *AgHR* 48 (2001), pp. 151–70; and what happened to parish property after the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act, see R. Wells, 'The Poor Law Commission and publicly-owned housing in the English countryside 1834–47', *AgHR* 55 (2007), pp. 181–204; J. Broad, 'The parish poor house in the long eighteenth century' in J. McEwan and P. Sharpe, *The housing and living arrangements of the English poor* (2011), 246–62.

⁶¹ Shave, *Pauper policies*, p. 70.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 72–99.

decades of the old poor laws, all conceived to deter claimants: overseers instigated humiliating forms of parish work and intrusive assessments of 'character and conduct', for low amounts of relief in return.⁶³ Land agents such as Spencer were, therefore, operating within a variable landscape of hardening attitudes, and narrowing relief provision.

In Leicestershire the adoption of Gilbert's Act was very popular. By 1834 there were at least 11 Gilbert's Unions in operation including Sapcote.⁶⁴ Historians of the poor laws, including the Webbs and Felix Driver, somewhat underestimated the number of adoptions of Gilbert's Act, suggesting around 1000 parishes across England were within Gilbert's Unions or had adopted the legislation alone as a Gilbert's Parish.⁶⁵ The Webbs, therefore, argued that the Act had a 'relatively trifling' impact, given that it was meant to reform the system of the old poor laws.⁶⁶ This perspective is gradually shifting due to new research on locally created records which, rather than snapshot surveys produced by Select Committees or the Poor Law Commission, has uncovered more adoptions. In the western part of Sussex alone, for instance, there were 80 parishes providing relief according to Gilbert's Act, regularly sending their poor to workhouses.⁶⁷ Examining local records has also exposed the informal dynamics of Gilbert's Act, such as how parishes not officially under Gilbert's Act would send their parish poor to a Gilbert's Act workhouse. This was usually at a set rate per head per week. Both parishes would benefit from this economy, as would any contractors who were permitted to keep the profits from their labour.⁶⁸

The Sapcote Union expanded over time. At its official formation it comprised seven parishes, but by the spring of 1812 this had increased to 21 (see Table 1).⁶⁹ This story of growth was a common one, not least because parish officers and ratifying magistrates would have talked to each other, informing each other of their practices and agreements.⁷⁰ Although no workhouse committee minute books have survived for the Sapcote Union, scrutinizing the surviving parish records, such as overseers' account books, provides us with some further nuance. Desford regularly sent a monthly payment (5–10s.) to the workhouse committee by 1807 and from around 1808 started to receive money for the work undertaken by their poor 'at Sapcote', so the parish had joined the union before 1811.⁷¹ Interestingly, because of the proximity of other

⁶³ For a summary of parish work see C. J. Griffin, *Protest, politics and work in rural England, 1700–1850* (2013), pp. 31–5; for assessments of 'character and conduct' see literature in note 17.

⁶⁴ For a list see K. Morrison, *The workhouse: A study of poor-law buildings in England* (1999), p. 27; also see a list managed by P. Higginbotham, 'The history of poor law unions' [online] Available: www.workhouses.org.uk/unions/index.shtml#Gilbert [accessed 19 June 2020]. Assistant Commissioner Mr Hall noted a cluster of eight Gilbert's Unions in one part of Leicestershire in the *Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners* (1836), p. 436.

⁶⁵ The Webbs acknowledged 67 unions (totalling 924 parishes) but overlooked the fact that single parishes could, and did, adopt the Act unilaterally; Webb and Webb, *English poor law history*, pp. 173, 275. They refer to

the *Ninth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners* (1843). Driver notes there 68 Gilbert's Unions and 3 Gilbert's Parishes adopting the legislation alone (covering a total of 1,000 parishes), although a separate return of Gilbert's Unions (1844) lists 76 adoptions (1,075 parishes); F. Driver, *Power and pauperism: the workhouse system 1834–1884* (1993), p. 44, fn 45; BPP 1844 543, Select Committee on Poor Relief (Gilbert Unions).

⁶⁶ Webb and Webb, *English poor law history*, p. 276.

⁶⁷ Shave, *Pauper policies*, p. 66.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁶⁹ 7 Mar. 1813, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner (6 Green Park Buildings, Bath), FRE/9216.

⁷⁰ Shave, *Pauper policies*, p. 71.

⁷¹ Various dates from 1807 onwards, Desford Overseers Account Books 1804–1818 and 1813–1819, LLRRO DE 64/4 and 5.

TABLE 1. The development of the Sapcote Gilbert's Union, 1804–12

<i>Date</i>	<i>January 1804</i>	<i>March 1804</i>	<i>January 1806</i>	<i>April–May 1806</i>	<i>February 1811</i>	<i>May 1812</i>
<i>Context and source</i>	<i>(a)</i>	<i>(b)</i>	<i>(c)</i>	<i>(d)</i>	<i>(e)</i>	<i>(f)</i>
Parish						
Sapcote						
Ashby Magna						
Asby Parva						
Aston Flamville						
Bagworth			Petition			
Barlestone			Addition			
Barwell						
Cosby						
Countesthorpe						
Croft						
Desford						
Dunton						
Earl Shilton						
Frolesworth						
Huncote						
Leicester Forest						
Nailstone			Addition			
Narborough						
Normanton						
Obarton (?)			Petition			
Stoney Stanton						
Thurlastone						
Whetstone						
Wigston Parva						

Legend:

	Expressed interest in joining a union
	Likely in Sapcote Union
	Member of Sapcote Union

Context:

(a) Parishes that wish to join a neighbouring union.

(b) Parishes that wish to join a union.

(c) Parishes in the Sapcote Union, with additional parishes joining the union ('Addition') and parishes that have petitioned to join the union ('Petition')

(d) Parishes in the incorporation of the '7 united parishes'. Barwell asked to join in May 1806. Other parishes which may have been in the union are highlighted given the contextual information in (c) and (e).

(e) Parishes noted in union.

(f) Parishes listed on a workhouse rules poster.

TABLE 1. *continued**Sources:*

(a) 13 Jan. 1804, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9035; (b) 6 Mar. 1804, Spencer to Frewen Turner (7 South Parade, Bath), TK FRE/9036; (c) n.d. [probably Jan.] 1806, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9070; (d) 6 Apr. 1806, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9078; 23 May 1806, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9079; (e) 26 Feb. 1811, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9208; (f) 11 May 1812, Rules of the Sapcote House of Industry, LLRRO DE933/40; in H. Whitley, *History of the parish of Sapcote in the county of Leicester. Compiled by the Rev. H. Whitley, M.A. (1853)*, pp. 12–13, it notes that Sapcote Union comprised 15 parishes, but that may only be correct c.1811.

Gilbert's Unions, some parishes which expressed initial interest in joining the Sapcote Union, eventually sent poor parishioners elsewhere. Normanton, for instance, sent at least one pauper to the Empingham Union workhouse in the early 1800s.⁷² Whether it officially 'joined' the Empingham Union or not is not clear, but as Table 1 shows, the parish was considered part of the Sapcote Union by 1812. The Sapcote Union was dissolved during the implementation of the 1834 Amendment Act, although several Gilbert's Act workhouses across England maintained their status until the Act was officially repealed in 1869.⁷³

III

Spencer was involved in the establishment of the Sapcote Gilbert's Union from the very beginning. The plan to form a union at Sapcote commenced when local parishes expressed their intention to join a pre-existing union. Spencer wrote to Frewen Turner in January 1804, informing him that local farmers of Stoney Stanton and Croft were 'now all wishing for a House of Industry' like that operated by the parishes of Sharnford and Claybrooke.⁷⁴ These parishes operated a workhouse whereby any profit derived from the labour of the inmates was divided amongst the parishes.⁷⁵ Within three months, a new union was announced with Sapcote at the centre, which Stoney Stanton and Croft would join. Two additional parishes also 'signified their wishes to join'. Demonstrating Spencer's detailed knowledge of the poor relief systems in these areas, he did write that: 'If this [the union] ever comes about I hope they remember that a Doctor will be necessary', 'they' being the parishes desiring the union.⁷⁶ While the provision of free medical attendance was not compulsory under the old poor laws, it was customary for parishes to provide this when it was required, and clearly it was a form of relief Sapcote had often provided but other local parishes had not.⁷⁷ Spencer both knew, and could compare, the sorts of poor relief offered in each parish, and had thoughts about how to standardize it.

With enough local interest for a union, which Spencer had garnered by attending local meetings, the next task was to find or build a union workhouse. Spencer advised Frewen Turner

⁷² Normanton Churchwardens and Overseers Account Book 1769–1813, LLRRO DE1579/5.

⁷³ See note 60 for literature on workhouse buildings after 1834.

⁷⁴ 13 Jan. 1804, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9035.

⁷⁵ See accounts 23 Apr. 1808 to 10 Oct. 1808, as well as further accounts, Sharnford Overseers Account Book 1779–1830, LLRRO DE2401/10.

⁷⁶ 13 Jan. 1804, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9035.

⁷⁷ Shave, *Pauper policies*, p. 199.

that a purpose-built, new building was most suitable, whereby each parish in the union could pay rent for the house and grounds, including interest on the money spent. A site had already been considered, and Spencer now had to check it and develop a workhouse plan.⁷⁸ Two years, though, passed before the workhouse opened its doors. There were several hurdles Spencer had to clear first. He had to ensure Gilbert's Act was both supported by ratepayers, and that the adoption was undertaken according to the formal, legal procedures required. Spencer knew that, in order to adopt the Act legally, a general meeting was required where both building plans and the means of raising the money to fund the building could be discussed.⁷⁹ He was concerned the reforms would not pass, however, and wrote to Frewen Turner in detail about the words of Mr Ackmore, who provided some reassurance. Ackmore did not think the Act would be rejected, and mentioned that a gentleman, Mr Lowett, previously against the plans, was now in favour of them. Someone may have intervened. Such reassurance led Spencer to line up Ackmore for a place as a guardian on the workhouse committee.⁸⁰ Spencer reported to Frewen Turner that the incorporation of parishes had 'at length' taken place in May 1805. The deed, which would have been ratified by two magistrates, was taken into his possession.⁸¹ The documents were not left to overseers or other vestrymen to take care of, as would have been the case in other, open parish contexts.

The next stages in the establishment of the Sapcote Union were the search for the right piece of land on which to situate the new building, as well as manage its construction. Spencer seemed to be integral to both of these roles. Initially there were concerned tenants to pacify. The rumours of a new workhouse upset tenants, such as John Saunt who had heard a rumour that the workhouse would be built on his homestead. He asked to be told the truth, requesting a meeting with the landowner himself. Spencer felt compelled to say it was either on his, or on Cobcroft, whose tenant was Mr Brown, but that a decision had not yet been made. Spencer writes to Frewen Turner 'it must rest entirely with you to make the choice'. Spencer had already been pushing for the building on Saunt's land some days before – Saunt had no family and only used it as a garden, he argued, and would continue to be able to keep two cows. If the workhouse was built on Brown's homestead, which is likely to have been smaller, Brown would have been unable to keep cows.⁸² While it is unclear whether Saunt's or Brown's land was seized, this reflects the mediator and messenger roles of land agents highlighted by Beardmore. Indeed, Spencer had to encourage the landowner to make a difficult decision, carefully inform tenants of these plans, and then deliver the bad news to one tenant.

Spencer now had to finalize the workhouse plans, stake out the land and buy in and store the building materials.⁸³ He consulted several men, possibly architects or land surveyors,

⁷⁸ 6 Mar. 1804, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9036.

⁷⁹ n.d. 1804, Spencer to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9040.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ 10 May 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9054.

⁸² Ibid.; 14 May 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO),

TK FRE/9055.

⁸³ 24 May 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9056; 7 June 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9057; 14 June 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9058; 6 Sept. 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9059; 15 Sept. 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9060.

when putting the plans together. Spencer also wanted to show Frewen Turner the plans of the Bedworth and Meriden workhouses which he obtained on a Saturday trip to Warwickshire, as well as the proposed plan for Sapcote.⁸⁴ This illustrates, as will be discussed below, the extent to which land agents could undertake research on behalf of employers. By June 1805, the plan for the workhouse building was finalized.⁸⁵ Spencer continued with comparisons during the building phases, possibly to reassure his employer, and/or himself, that he was managing the work well. Concurrently, a small workhouse was being constructed 14 miles away at Kibworth (Leicestershire) for a union of three or four parishes. Spencer wrote: 'it is remarkable they ordered the same quantity of plaster for theirs which I have for ours'.⁸⁶ Spencer also relayed setbacks to his employer, such as when the canal was damaged causing a low supply of wood.⁸⁷ The workhouse was fenced off in January 1806 and opened for inmates in April.⁸⁸

It would be wrong to assume that Spencer was an enthusiastic implementer of the reforms, even though the achievements noted above might suggest that conclusion. As early as 1804, Spencer informed Frewen Turner that he did not wish to sit on the workhouse committee: 'I am determined to hold no office under it'. He went on: 'It has cost me a good deal of time and trouble writing Letters &c. already and I had much rather be at my studies'.⁸⁹ Two years later, when the workhouse building was being fenced off and internal works were underway, Spencer expressed how alone and abandoned he felt – and in need of more support from his employer: 'I should be glad to have you here while the building is about, as I don't like to be left too much to myself'. The second half of the sentence is also rather despondent and small: 'but you may depend on my doing for the best as far as I know I am able'.⁹⁰

IV

When the workhouse was near completion, Spencer turned his attention to assembling the workhouse committee. Frewen Turner himself assumed the position of Visitor. The Visitor could be predominately a symbolic role, with more of the groundwork undertaken by the Deputy Visitor.⁹¹ By 1811, the Reverend James Eyre Harington was the Visitor.⁹² This was not an unusual selection – Lord Egremont placed the loyal Reverend Thomas Sockett at the head of his Sutton Union.⁹³ Spencer managed to avoid the role of Deputy Visitor for several years,

⁸⁴ 24 May 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9056.

⁸⁵ 14 June 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9058.

⁸⁶ 26 Oct. 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner (Brick Wall Northiam, Sussex [hereafter BW]), FRE/9063.

⁸⁷ 6 Sept. 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9059.

⁸⁸ 10 Jan. 1806, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9069; 6 Apr. 1806, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9078. The total cost was £1226 3s. 11d. 3 Oct. 1806, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9089.

⁸⁹ n.d. 1804, Spencer to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9040.

⁹⁰ 4 Jan. 1806, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9063.

⁹¹ 17 Mar. 1806, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE 9075; renewed by Spencer evidence, 6 July 1808, Spencer to Frewen Turner (11 Millbank Row, Westminster [hereafter MR]), TK FRE/9139.

⁹² 11 May 1812, Rules of the Sapcote House of Industry, LLRRO DE933/40.

⁹³ Shave, *Pauper policies*, pp. 96–7; also S. Haines and L. Lawson, *Poor cottages and proud palaces: the life and work of Thomas Sockett of Petworth 1777–1859* (2007).

probably until 1811.⁹⁴ But in the meantime, it appears Frewen Turner asked him to take the role of Treasurer. Spencer replied saying that he was 'pretty well acquainted with the Act of Parliament' – the Treasurer also had to be an elected Guardian.⁹⁵ Spencer's lack of a formal committee position caused people some confusion. It was assumed, on at least one occasion, that he was a Deputy Visitor by a parishioner with a complaint.⁹⁶ In the first instance, two men filled the roles of Deputy Visitor and Treasurer, namely Mr Joshua Clark, a farmer, and Mr John Smith, a framework knitter.⁹⁷ They were interested in the reforms from the outset, helping Frewen Turner and Spencer to select a location for the workhouse.⁹⁸ Spencer's attempt to persuade Clark to become the Deputy Visitor failed; such a significant role would interfere with his 'other engagements'.⁹⁹ Smith took the role of Deputy Visitor initially, and Clark finally took the role by 1810.¹⁰⁰ Smith did not enjoy his role – it was tiring and confusing, and he reported that he would have not got through the year if Clark 'had not stood at his elbow'.¹⁰¹ Clark also found his role onerous, and relinquished his Deputy Visitor position at roughly the same time as he retired from farming.¹⁰² Spencer continued to carefully consider the suitability of people for these leadership roles. He thought that the new or returning magistrate, Mr Harrison, needed to be 'better acquainted with this business and the habits of the poor in this neighbourhood', and was perhaps more suited to the role of Visitor rather than Deputy Visitor to avoid 'the labourious part of the business'.¹⁰³

Spencer clearly selected, managed and conversed openly with these men in senior roles of the workhouse committee. His relationship with the Guardians, however, was more difficult. Guardians were elected representatives from the parishes that joined the union. Alongside the Visitor and Deputy Visitor, it was their role to manage the institution, deciding who went into the workhouse, what routines and work to implement, how it should be supplied with items such as furniture, clothing and food. They also appointed salaried staff such as governors. Spencer appears to have understood the Guardians' preferences in his correspondence to Frewen Turner. In July 1808, when more parishes requested to join the union, he wrote 'I think the Guardians would have no objection to add a few more parishes', especially given the 'very small' population of only 21 people from the 15 parishes currently there.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁴ 11 May 1812, Rules of the Sapcote House of Industry, LLRRO DE933/40.

⁹⁵ 14 Oct. 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9062.

⁹⁶ 11 Dec. 1807, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9119.

⁹⁷ *The poll, at the electing of two knights of the shire to represent the county of Leicester in parliament* (1830), pp. 94–5 [online] Available: www.ancestry.co.uk Poll Books and Electoral Registers, 1538–1893. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012. Original data: London, England, UK and London Poll Books, London Metropolitan Archives and Guildhall Library [accessed 5 Aug. 2020].

⁹⁸ 14 May 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9055; 24 May 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9056; 7 June 1805, Spencer to Frewen

Turner (CO), TK FRE/9057; 15 Sept. 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner (BW), TK FRE/9060.

⁹⁹ 14 Oct. 1805, William Spencer to Frewen Turner (BW), TK FRE/9062.

¹⁰⁰ 18 Oct. 1807, Spencer to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9114; 8 June 1810, Spencer to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9188.

¹⁰¹ 16 Feb. 1806, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9095.

¹⁰² 11 Feb. 1810, Spencer to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9178; 26 Feb. 1811, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9208.

¹⁰³ 14 June 1811, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9212.

¹⁰⁴ 6 July 1808, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9139.

Spencer also presented himself as a reassuring presence to the Guardians, such as when a magistrate was presented with complaints from the poor, he stated that Gilbert's Act 'is so full and strong in favour of the officers of the House there is nothing to fear'.¹⁰⁵ But the relationship was unsteady, and there are several examples of when the Guardians resented and resisted the interference. When Spencer took the role of Treasurer from Smith in 1807, with a salary, he wrote rather defensively, 'They have no personal objection to me', just that the Guardians wanted to keep the books, and the money, themselves. In the same letter, Spencer said the Whetstone Guardian would rather remove the poor children from the workhouse than pay the workhouse teacher.¹⁰⁶ Spencer had hired the teacher when the workhouse opened.¹⁰⁷ These seem fairly mild areas of contention, but Spencer was also informed by his ally Smith that, 'in plain terms ... it would prevent disputes if I was to keep away'. Spencer was now caught between the Guardians and Frewen Turner: 'You seem to be angry that I do not go to the House of Industry', he wrote, 'I hope it will satisfy you so far as not to force me upon them, as that would make me very uncomfortable'.¹⁰⁸ The Sapcote Union Guardians, a year into the operation of the new workhouse, were obviously pushing the land agent and by logical extension, the powers he represented, away from the workhouse committee.

This uneasy dynamic between land agent and the Guardians was also mirrored in Spencer's relationship with the magistrates. This is illuminated in a case from October 1807, when several Guardians and Spencer interviewed a Corley parishioner in the workhouse. He used to live with his daughter while in receipt of 10s. per week in outdoor relief. Spencer reported that the money was not put towards his welfare; 'he was literally swarming with vermin when he was brought to the House'. The parish offered 4s. for his daughter to take care of him again, but she asked for 5s. Eventually the vestrymen of Corley compromised and allowed 4s. 6d. per week, but the parishioner did not want to return, and attempted suicide. It is clear the magistrates wanted to investigate the case further. Spencer wrote that Clark, the union Visitor at the time, suggested a 'public notice should deter needy and selfish Magistrates from interfering so much with Houses of Industry'. The magistrate they were at odds with was Mr Noel who wanted the case brought before the next quarter sessions. Spencer was livid – because Noel did not take evidence directly from the man: 'Why dont [sic] the Magistrates learn the truth from his own Mouth'. Noel was an 'enemy' of workhouses; but Spencer thought this was due to their costs rather their impact on the poor.¹⁰⁹ Spencer was also not pleased that the poor had long-held entitlements to complain about poor relief to magistrates, referring to a poor woman as causing 'trouble' by doing just that.¹¹⁰ As well as checking the legality and accountancy of Gilbert's Act workhouses, magistrates could specify changes to their management. At Sapcote in 1810, magistrates recommended separate rooms, away from the workrooms, for the aged and infirm to rest, and private rooms for married couples, but Spencer bolshily intimated there would be

¹⁰⁵ 11 Feb. 1810, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9178.

¹⁰⁶ 28 Sept. 1807, Spencer to Frewen Turner (BW), TK FRE/9111.

¹⁰⁷ n.d. 1804, Spencer to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9040.

¹⁰⁸ 28 Sept. 1807, Spencer to Frewen Turner (BW), TK

FRE/9111.

¹⁰⁹ 18 Oct. 1807, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9114.

¹¹⁰ 15 Aug. 1809, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9161.

little need for the latter.¹¹¹ Clearly this land agent struggled with the independence of both magistrates and Guardians, two groups within the micro-politics of poor relief who did not have to seek his approval or that of his employer.

V

Previous research has shown that those involved in the administration of the old poor law sought information on how to run workhouses from other places. This knowledge, often framed as 'best practice', was shared in correspondence, through visits to each other's workhouses, through the recommendations of other people (especially employees such as schoolteachers and workhouse contractors) and publications such as pamphlets. These networks of knowledge were dominated by welfare administrators – overseers and other vestry members at parish level, magistrates, and members of workhouse committees.¹¹² The evidence for land agents is limited. The only example I have identified in administrative documents was how William Tyler, who served as a land agent and a clerk for two of Egremont's Sussex Gilbert's institutions, compared workhouse contractor rates between the two. It was 'likely that other aspects of workhouse management were compared'.¹¹³ Spencer's detailed correspondence illustrates that land agents could do much more to gather knowledge on how to practice poor relief, just like the official administrators of the poor laws.

Spencer drew upon the practices of both neighbouring workhouses and those from further afield. He actively sought information from the Ullesthorpe workhouse in Claybrooke parish, just two parishes away from Sapcote. Before the Sapcote workhouse opened, Spencer requested Frewen Turner to send him the rules of the Ullesthorpe workhouse to examine.¹¹⁴ Spencer obviously knew Frewen Turner had these in his possession. The Ullesthorpe workhouse, also established under Gilbert's Act, became a source of tension and competition at times. When Spencer mentioned how Ullesthorpe was considering 'taking in' the parish of Barbage, its boundaries expanding further towards Sapcote, he became defensive and eager to support new additions to his union, this new welfare domain. Parishes were 'continually applying to be admitted into our house', Spencer wrote boastfully.¹¹⁵ This neighbouring union was also used by the land agent to think about matters of economy, as Tyler had at Sussex. The 1s. extra it cost to accommodate one inmate per week at Sapcote compared to Ullesthorpe led Spencer to question whether their master was competent and economical; he was also taking home 10s. per week from the inmates' stocking-making Spencer reported. In the same letter he noted 'I cant [sic] say I ever had a good opinion of him'.¹¹⁶ In 1811, Spencer seemed resigned to the fact that the Ullesthorpe workhouse was 'better managed' overall, and a better governor for Sapcote, he thought, could be appointed.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ 19 Oct. 1810, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9196.

¹¹² Shave, *Pauper Policies*, pp. 150–65.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 158, throughout pp. 151–9.

¹¹⁴ n.d. [probably Jan. 1806], Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9070; 17 Mar. 1806, Spencer and Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9075.

¹¹⁵ 6 July 1808, Spencer to Frewen Turner (MR), TK FRE/9139.

¹¹⁶ 29 Jan. 1810, Spencer to Frewen Turner (MR), TK FRE/9176.

¹¹⁷ 14 June 1811, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9212.

Spencer gleaned further information during visits to other workhouses within Leicestershire. In 1808 he told Smith that a manufactory ‘similar to that which I saw last week in the Industry School at Oakum’ could be set up in Sapcote. Oakum, on the east side of Leicester, instructed poor children to make gloves, ‘by a method entirely different to any I ever saw before’; Spencer was impressed by the ‘faculty with which the children’ worked.¹¹⁸ In addition, Spencer reported on the attempts workhouse committee members had made to obtain information too. Between the summers of 1808 and 1809 the workhouse population had almost doubled, and it was agreed by the committee that a uniform should be introduced. Uniforms were commonly associated with charitable institutions at this time, such as almshouses and London’s Foundling Hospital, but increasingly they were becoming associated with the more punitive regimes of prisons and workhouses. Workhouse committees were also keen, especially from the beginning of the eighteenth century, to differentiate, stigmatize and control particular groups of paupers within the uniformed population, requiring unmarried mothers, for instance, to wear yellow.¹¹⁹ Considering styles of uniform, two members of the workhouse committee, including Clark, ‘went to Bedworth to see the dresses there’. But the workhouse, about 20 miles away in Warwickshire, had discontinued the use of uniforms, as had another nearby workhouse. Clark reported that if any nearby workhouse had a uniform they would like to implement one, ‘but they do not like to be singular’.¹²⁰ They understood that the Sapcote workhouse could look more punitive, in the eyes of the public, with the introduction of a uniform.

Spencer reported these practices back and forth to Frewen Turner, explaining to his employer the information he and members of the workhouse committee had obtained and from whom. Land agents could themselves also become a repository of information on the modes of best running workhouses, which landowners readily drew upon too. Frewen Turner asked Spencer for his thoughts on the how to employ the poor on his other estates. ‘Sure something might be thought of to employ the poor in Sussex’ Spencer replied, there was ‘advantageous’ cotton weaving at ‘Stamford, Clay Brooks [*prob.* Claybrooke], &c.’ for the making of gowns and other articles and mops were made ‘with considerable success’ at Leicester’s House of Correction, he wrote.¹²¹ The skills of the land agent in acquiring and communicating information were beneficial to the development of practices in workhouses on estates.

VI

Spencer held a multitude of prejudices that reflected what Keith Snell has termed the ‘culture of local xenophobia’, as well as the classist and patriarchal character of rural society at this time.¹²² He thought that a ‘gang robbery’ was led by a man he called ‘Irish Pratt’, and

¹¹⁸ 6 July 1808, Spencer to Frewen Turner (MR), TK FRE/9139.

¹¹⁹ The practice continued after it was banned by the Poor Law Commission in 1839; V. Richmond, *Clothing the poor in nineteenth-century England* (2013), p. 289; S. Williams, *Unmarried motherhood in the metropolis: pregnancy, the poor law and provision, 1700–1850*

(2018), p. 63.

¹²⁰ 15 Aug. 1809, Spencer to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9161.

¹²¹ 5 Oct. 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9061.

¹²² K. D. M. Snell, ‘The culture of local Xenophobia’, *Social Hist.* 28 (2003), pp. 1–30.

a woman from Hinckley who penned her grievances to a magistrate was 'of ill fame'.¹²³ The masons employed on the workhouse were 'slack', he said, because there was too much work available for them.¹²⁴ He also embarked on a character assassination of the Methodist workhouse governor. The governor apparently had little control over the inmates, and in 1807 Spencer described him as having 'more tongue than all the rest'.¹²⁵ In 1810 he thought his ability to earn profits from stocking-making in the workhouse involved 'Methodical tricks'.¹²⁶ Spencer's prejudices extended to the family of the governor. Sometime after the governor died and Spencer advertised for his replacement, a 'violent' meeting of the Guardians took place.¹²⁷ Some Guardians wanted to keep the governor's widow as governess and their 19-year-old son as the new governor, whilst other Guardians, and Spencer, wanted a change.¹²⁸ Spencer focused on the son: his character was 'none of the best'; he was not able to 'write and figure properly' and managed with 'neglect and extravagance'. But perhaps the primary reason for their expulsion was that Spencer thought it wrong that the workhouse children were sent to the Meeting School, led by the Methodist chapel, instead of to the parish church every Sunday.¹²⁹

Spencer's ill-feelings extended towards the labouring poor as well, as he revealed in his commentary about the impact of the building of the workhouse on local parishioners. When the workhouse was still being constructed he wrote that while 'the poor are exerting themselves to prevent going into the new house', 'their behaviour seems to be rapidly altering for the better'.¹³⁰ This commentary reveals something about the true purpose of the workhouse, which may have been to provide suitable accommodation for the vulnerable in line with Gilbert's Act, but was also – as was the case for many workhouses by the early nineteenth century – to act as a deterrent for able-bodied poor. He wrote enthusiastically: 'I am more than ever convinced of their utility. As the real poor are much better taken care of, and the designs of the idle and profligate frustrated.' They would be 'obliged to become useful members of society', he contended.¹³¹ While, under the Act, outdoor relief could still be granted by the Guardians on appeal to the Visitor and Deputy Visitor, this could at times cause tension, as it had in Egremont's Unions in Sussex.¹³² The magistrate Noel, for instance, was upset to know the Shilton Guardian was distributing outdoor relief rather than admitting the poor into the workhouse.¹³³ Maybe now there was a workhouse in place, he was determined to fill it up to make financial savings. The workhouse did indeed become

¹²³ 26 Feb. 1811, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9208; 15 Aug. 1809, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9161.

¹²⁴ 14 Oct. 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9059.

¹²⁵ 6 Feb. 1807, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9095.

¹²⁶ 29 Jan. 1810, Spencer to Frewen Turner (MR), TK FRE/9176; 6 Feb. 1807, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9095.

¹²⁷ 2 Feb. 1810, Spencer to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9178; 31 Aug. 1810, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO),

TK FRE/9195.

¹²⁸ 10 May 1811, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9211.

¹²⁹ 14 June 1811, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9212.

¹³⁰ 6 Sept. 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9059.

¹³¹ 5 Oct. 1805, Spencer to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9061.

¹³² Shave, *Pauper policies*, pp. 96–7.

¹³³ 11 Dec. 1807, Spencer to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9119.

crowded in 1809, and by the winter Spencer thought it was ‘filling too fast’ on account of parishes sending in men with wives and families. Spencer had a solution to this, but one which displayed his cold-hearted attitude towards the poor: ‘I think the Governor ought to be instructed counteract these as much as possible,’ Spencer wrote, ‘by tasking them in such a manner as will make them glad to go out again.’¹³⁴

Spencer’s letters give us an impression that the deterrent nature of the workhouse developed over time, but to the labouring poor the workhouse was an instant symbol of oppression, preventing access to the long-held entitlements to an independent life supported by outdoor relief. Gilbert’s Act workhouses were intentionally damaged by the labouring poor, and were also targeted during the Swing Riots in many parts of southern England, illustrating the perception, as well as reality, of them as a site of oppression.¹³⁵ Sapcote workhouse was also perceived by the local population as oppressive, and the governor and his wife were the faces of the system. When the governor and governess first arrived at the workhouse, on a cold January day of 1806 they were hit with snowballs, thrown by several women whom the Spencer called ‘viragos’, a term used pejoratively to mean unpleasant, violent and masculine women.¹³⁶ There were attacks on the physical fabric of the workhouse itself. In March, several boys ‘did much mischief’ by going up and down the house and pulling bits of the building down. Whilst bricks were pelted against the door from the outside, one of the governor’s children happened to open the door from the inside, and was struck.¹³⁷

Disobedience amongst inmates within the workhouse was also a form of resistance to the system itself. In 1808 Mrs Hacket was prosecuted for ‘misbehaviour’ within its walls. Several Guardians decided that she should be given outdoor relief, to remain out of the workhouse with her child, rather than receive a sentence in the bridewell. This decision could have been made on financial grounds, and/or to maintain order within the workhouse.¹³⁸ Two men were locked into the workhouse prison for 24 hours for complaining to the magistrates about workhouse clothing. Spencer, as well as the Guardians, preferred it if complaints passed to the governor and then to the Guardians for redress, although we cannot be sure whether or not these men had already tried this route. Their actions antagonized Spencer, and probably the Guardians as well, except for the independently spirited Guardian Mr Mettam who – according to Spencer – encouraged inmates to ‘fetch warrants’ from magistrates.¹³⁹ Indeed this was within their rights. Spencer, in his role as a constable, was also able to intervene on violent acts of resistance, such as in 1810 when three men, who were deemed fit to work according to a medical inspection but remained ‘idle’, assaulted the workhouse governor. Spencer, in his letter to Frewen Turner, claims to have broken up the conflict, before two of the men were sent to the bridewell.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ 24 Nov. 1809, Spencer to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9169.

¹³⁵ Griffin, *Protest, politics and work*, p. 38; an example: J. O. Smith, *One Monday in November...and beyond: The Selborne and Headley workhouse riots of 1830 ... and their aftermath* (rev. edn, 2002).

¹³⁶ n.d. [probably Jan. 1806], Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9070.

¹³⁷ 17 Mar. 1806, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9075.

¹³⁸ 1 Aug. 1808, Spencer to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9142.

¹³⁹ 11 Feb. 1810, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9178.

¹⁴⁰ 31 Aug. 1810, Spencer (Sapcote) to Frewen Turner (CO), TK FRE/9195.

VII

In a letter in 1809, Spencer asked his employer to stop should he pass through the estate one day, so 'that you may see the many improvements that have taken place since you was here last'.¹⁴¹ From Spencer's perspective, such 'improvements' could have included the workhouse as well as other areas of estate management. Indeed, land agents such as Spencer were intensely involved in the provision of poor relief in the parishes they presided over on behalf of their employers. Not only did they seek to improve the land and, as recent literature has demonstrated, tenure and facilitates within rural communities, they were also intimately involved in improvements, as they saw it, in the provision of statutory poor relief. The correspondence which flowed from Spencer's study to Frewen Turner's residences is rich and, in combination with surviving parish records, provides exhaustive details surrounding the establishment of a new workhouse. These letters give us a window into how deeply land agents could be involved in the administration of poor relief. Spencer had an important role in the founding of a new workhouse, the shaping of how it was managed, and sought out new policies and practices and ultimately reported on the progress of the regime and its impacts.

Spencer used his close attention to detail and research abilities to develop a good knowledge of how to implement Gilbert's Act at Sapcote. The letters demonstrate that he secured the support of ratepayers in the locality, understood the intricacies of the Act, the importance of different workhouse committee roles, and who should ideally take them. He drew upon the knowledge of local men and fellow workhouse administrators residing in other parishes and unions, both near and far. Land agents were able to research and understand different modes of 'best practice' and identify new relief practices. He reported on the endeavours of the workhouse committee, such as when they considered adopting a workhouse uniform. This particular case revealed that the workhouse committee and Spencer understood what practices should not be adopted. To some extent, Spencer became a bank of knowledge on which his employer could draw, even leading him to be consulted on poor relief matters on estates he was not managing. Steven King compared the skills and attributes taught to potential new land managers on degree programmes today with those possessed by land agents of the past. An interest in all matters financial was important, both then and today, including making sound investments with minimal risks, but also and perhaps equally importantly careful diplomacy was essential to nullify rumours and resolve disputes, as well as 'stamina for lots of travelling'.¹⁴² Such attributes were to be found in the land agents of the nineteenth century implementing new welfare regimes.

It is interesting that Spencer sought to increase the size of the union, especially in response to the prospect of the neighbouring union swelling in size. To some extent this may have been about economy, as already detailed. But this was also about spreading Frewen Turner's influence and power over large tracts of land adjacent to his own. Lord Egremont had the same attitude, to the extent to which, when new unions were formed under the New Poor Law, some years later, he was most perturbed that a parish which, according to an ally 'belonged to

¹⁴¹ 15 Aug. 1809, Spencer to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9161.

¹⁴² King, 'The role of the land agent', p. 136.

him', had been placed into a union formed mainly of parishes belonging to his neighbour, the Duke of Richmond.¹⁴³ This research reveals that land agents too could be enthralled by the prospect of empire building, and developed competitive strategies against the union-building of their neighbours, in this case Ullesthorpe. Interestingly Thomas Gilbert MP had been a land agent himself for Lord Gower in Staffordshire. This position may have allowed him licence to imagine just how such unions would have been formed.¹⁴⁴ As the landlord's eyes and ears in the local community, land agents could, in their written dispatches, provide information about such parochial affairs, allowing the landowner themselves to perhaps persuade a parish to join through gentle written or verbal encouragements.

Spencer's letters about implementing the new poor relief regime tell us about the ways in which he negotiated relationships in the rural community. The purpose of a land agent, Webster outlined, was to act 'as "mediator" between rural and urban communities, and between aristocrats and rural labourers'.¹⁴⁵ By examining a land agent's influence over poor relief, the multifarious relationships he had with other key individuals within the 'welfare process' is evident. His role as agent, plus his roles as schoolmaster for the children of Sapcote and the rotating roles of constable and churchwarden, gave Spencer considerable authority within the locality. It is little wonder that the key welfare administrators – the Guardians on the workhouse committee – gave him and his ideas some respect. They were unable to object to Spencer's early preferences, to appoint a schoolteacher and for himself to receive a salary in post as Treasurer. Spencer, on several occasions, also spoke on behalf of the Guardians, assuming some insight into their needs and desires. Spencer may have had a confidence or even complacency in this dynamic, resulting in his own defensiveness when things did not go as he wanted. He was aware that the business of a land agent could be troublesome to the wider populous, writing once that 'I may give some offence, which I should not like to do on any account'.¹⁴⁶ This awkwardness was also detected in the relationship between Spencer and another group within the 'welfare process': magistrates. Spencer's letters indicate that land agents could be quite opposed to the autonomy of the magistrates, and their powers to oversee local relief practices.

Beardmore concluded in her study that the relationship between the land agent and tenant was 'based on an unspoken and unwritten contract', both silent and respectful, each acknowledging the other's position and expectations.¹⁴⁷ Relationships between land agents and those in need of poor relief did not follow this pattern. Spencer's letters illustrate the low regard the poor felt towards his innovations and, in return, the lowly view Spencer had of those in need. The workhouse represented the oppressive power of the landed elite. Spencer's dispatches detailed the showering of snowballs to welcome the workhouse staff, and bricks which were pelted at the deterrent institution's door. Insubordination, both within or outside of the institution, which could amount to little more than voicing concerns, exposed the injustices which the new

¹⁴³ Haines and Lawson, *Poor cottages and proud palaces*, p. 169, cited in Shave, *Pauper policies*, p. 171.

¹⁴⁴ R. S. Thompson, 'Gilbert, Thomas (bap. 1720, d. 1798)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford, 2004; online edition, Oct. 2013); [online] Available: www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10703 [accessed

18 Aug. 2020].

¹⁴⁵ Webster, 'Estate improvement', p. 54.

¹⁴⁶ 24 Nov. 1809, Spencer to Frewen Turner, TK FRE/9169.

¹⁴⁷ Beardmore, 'Landowner, tenant and agent', p. 196.

system legitimized. These were the disenfranchised, and often able-bodied, labouring poor, not the 'real poor' according to Spencer, whose entitlements for outdoor relief to support their low wages was under threat when institutions such as these were opened. Accommodation and arduous repetitive work within the workhouse would shock them out of idleness, thought Spencer, regardless of the national economic downturn. Such viewpoints were commonly held by landowners of the time, and seemingly also land agents, so rather than seeing Gilbert's Act as a 'wave of humanitarian feeling' in England, letters about the implementation of it on the ground could demonstrate somewhat the opposite: the end of benign paternalism.¹⁴⁸ This makes the Amendment Act of 1834, with the deterrent-based workhouse system, all the more unsurprising. The relief regimes implemented by land agents for Frewen Turner and his contemporaries provided the predecessor regimes to this national transformation.

More micro-studies such as this one could enhance our knowledge of the tasks undertaken by land agents, and the relationships they forged, under the old poor laws. Although such research may put the lens on the land agent, the correspondence examined here also provides insights into their recipient, which is worth reflecting on. Unlike the Marquis of Anglesey, who did not set foot near his estate on the Dorset-Somerset border, Frewen Turner visited the estate intermittently.¹⁴⁹ This could be partly why Frewen Turner was interested in the matters of poor relief, as he perhaps understood that managing it was a key part of his role, similar to Lord Egremont. Clues as to Frewen Turner's interest can be found throughout Spencer's letters: he held a copy of the rules to the Ullesthorpe workhouse before such an institution was set up at Sapcote, for instance, and he then encouraged Spencer to write about the evolution of the workhouse and how it was received in detail. This should perhaps not be overstated; as Spencer occasionally felt overwhelmed by his work and sometimes requested that Frewen Turner pay the workhouse more attention. Nevertheless, it would be unlikely that an employee would go to such lengths, and spend so much time writing, if the interest was not reciprocated in mirroring messages. The landowner also received Spencer's immediate impressions of the poor, workers and workhouse employees, Guardians and magistrates. These contained prejudices he only detailed knowing that they would have been received by someone with the same or similar discriminatory mind-sets. Landowners of the era expected agents to be clubbable men who, as Monks' research shows, developed into their close friends.¹⁵⁰ Spencer's work at Sapcote, and his detailed reportage, evidently gained him the trust of Frewen Turner.

¹⁴⁸ D. Marshall, *The English poor in the eighteenth century: a study in social and administrative history* (1926), p. 159.

¹⁴⁹ Beardmore, 'Landowner, tenant and agent', p. 195.

¹⁵⁰ Monks, 'William Gould', p. 78.