

Hester Only - The North Nibley Foundling

Foundling : A child found abandoned

“The discovery that one of your ancestors was a foundling can be a disappointment in a way, since it is probably not possible to extend the line any further back. On the other hand, it may well be possible to find out details about the foundling’s early life.

We found from the I.G.I. the marriage of Robert TURNER to Hester ONLY in North Nibley, Glos. in 1808 but did not find any record of her baptism ... However we traced the date of her baptism when searching the County Record Office in Gloucester... The entry in the Parish Register of North Nibley reads – ‘Hester Only, a foundling – a Pauper’.

At this time the poor were the responsibility of the Parish, money for their upkeep being collected by means of rates and distributed by the Overseers of the Poor. They kept accounts of how this money was spent... Fortunately the books for North Nibley survived (at least in part...) and it is these which tell about her early life. An allowance was paid by the Overseers to someone in the village who cared for her, although in this case the records do not show the person’s name. The allowance begins at the rate of 5 shillings per 2 weeks, the first payment being made on 30th April 1784. This was a relatively large sum compared with most payments at this time, possibly because she came with nothing. Later on, the payments were reduced to 4 shillings per 2 weeks in 1786 and by 1792 had fallen to 2 shillings per 2 weeks, perhaps because by this time she was earning a small wage. One-off payments were made for special requirements and these included 1 shilling and 6d for shoes, 3 shillings and 7d for ‘things’, 1 shilling for linen and 8d for making 2 garments. The payment for shoes was made only 6 months after baptism, this would imply that she was not newborn when found, but as we have not found the 1851 Census returns, her exact age remains uncertain. The trail ends in Dec. 1793 when the last entry in the book for Hester Only says – ‘Gone to the workhouse’. More information might have been found had the records for the workhouse survived, but in this case they have not.”

An extract from an article by June Vaisey, published in the Journal of the North West Kent Family History Society, March 1983