

### **Catherine or Christian PLENTY or PURNELL or HARES**

This is another story of a woman, who received relief from the High Littleton Overseers. As a young widow, she applied for relief from the Farrington Gurney Overseers in 1829 but, after being examined by them, was deemed to belong to High Littleton, so was duly removed from Farrington to High Littleton by order dated 5 Jan 1830.

Catharine PLENTY was born at Chewton Mendip in about 1802/3. By the time she was 20 she had had two bastard children by Richard YORK of Chewton. Whether they died young or Catherine left them with someone else, I don't know, but soon afterwards Catharine got a job as a live-in servant with Mark PURNELL at Downs Farm, Hallatrow. Mark rented his 33 acre farm from Richard LANGFORD of Montvale (and after Richard's death from his daughters) for about £80 per annum.

Catherine's domestic duties for Mark PURNELL were obviously extended and she became pregnant. She was still only 21 at that time, whilst Mark was 50. A wedding was hastily arranged and they duly married at Temple Church in Bristol on 30 Nov 1824. Catherine was recorded as Christianna and both of them claimed falsely to be "of the parish of Temple". Catherine admitted years later that neither of them had ever lived in Bristol and she couldn't even remember which church it was in Bristol, where she was married. Catherine and Mark PURNELL had three children, Luke, Lucy and John, in quick succession and, although they lived in High Littleton parish, had them all baptised at Paulton church, which was nearer. By this time Catherine called herself Christian more often than not.

In June 1828 Mark PURNELL died, aged 54, and was buried at Paulton. Despite having to cope with three children aged 1, 2 and 3, Catherine continued to run the farm and paid the rent until ladyday 1829, when she gave it up. However, the farm seems to have been the only thing Catherine gave up and four months later she got pregnant by William HILL, a waggoner from Langport. At this point Catherine, aged 26, having had 5 children with another on the way and no husband, decided she couldn't manage, so approached the Overseers for support. High Littleton allowed her 3 shillings a week, which was soon increased to 4 shillings. The Overseers also tracked down William HILL and had a Bastardy Order made against him, under which he was obliged to pay 1/6 p.w. maintenance for the child Thomas, who was born in May 1830.

Catherine must really have had her hands full for the next couple of years but then fate took a hand. Both Luke, aged 7, and Lucy, aged 6, died of cholera in October 1832 and were buried at Paulton. Her bastard child Thomas also died around the same time. In June 1833 Catherine, now down to one child John (aged 6), married John HARES. John HARES, who was a bachelor and some ten years younger than Catherine (or Christian as she then called herself), worked as a collier. After their marriage they settled in Paulton and had three children John, Ann and Boaz. From then on Catherine's life became more conventional.

Rather unusually, Catherine had two sons called John living with her in 1841 – 13 year old John PURNELL, who was employed as a miner and 6 year old John HARES junior.

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