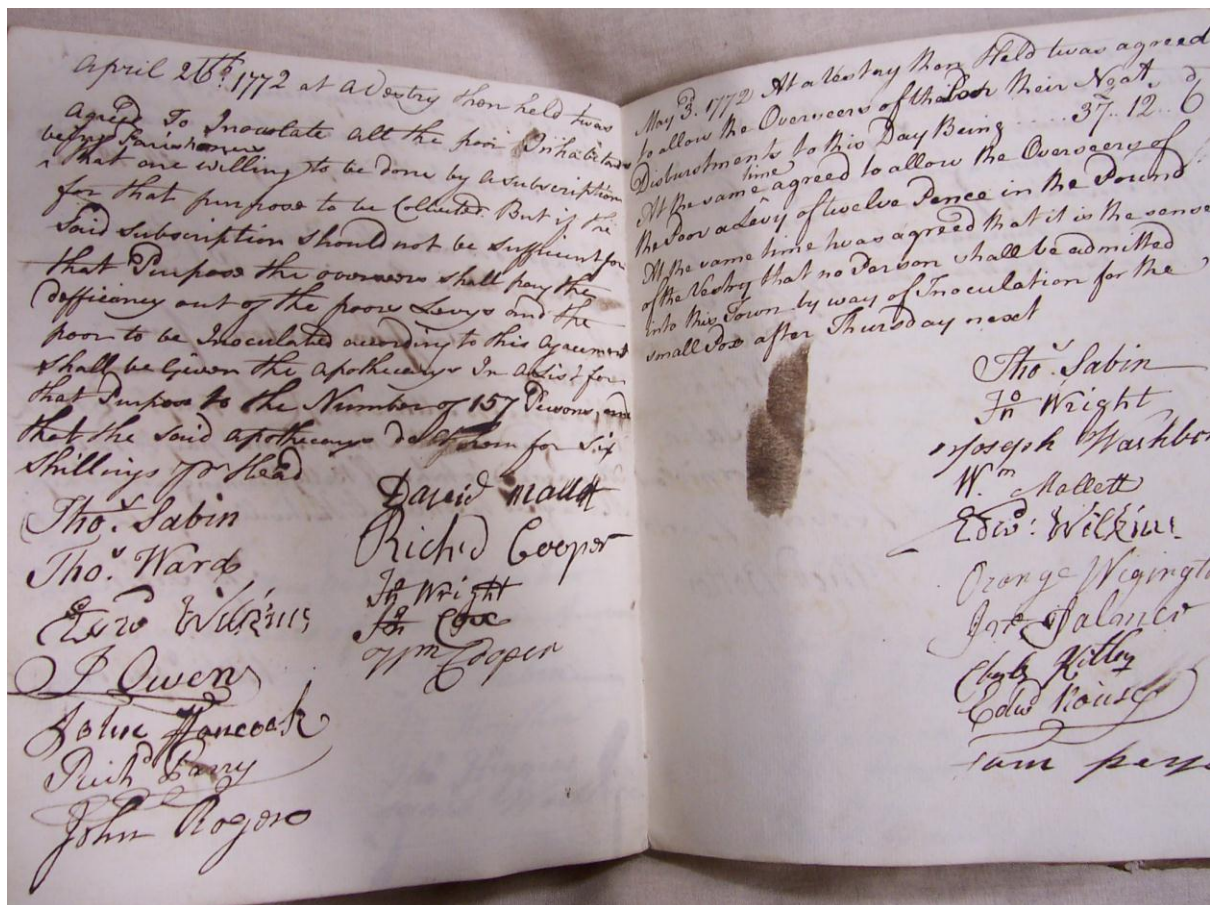


**Inoculating the Poor – Vestry Minute Book for Parish of St Edmund, Shipston on Stour (DR446/50)**



**Transcription**

April 26<sup>th</sup>: 1772 at a vestry then held twas agreed To Inoculate all the poor Inhabitants being Parishioners that are willing to be done by a subscription for that purpose to be collected. But if the said subscription should not be sufficient for that purpose the overseers shall pay the deficiency out of the poor Levy and the poor to be inoculated according to this agreement shall be given the apothecarys In a list for that purpose to the Number of 157 Persons and that the said apothecary do [? Perform] for six shillings per head.

May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1772. At a vestry then Held twas agreed to allow the Overseers of the Poor their Neat Disbursements to this Day being..... £37... 12s...6d. At the same time agreed to allow the Overseers of the Poor a Levy of twelve pence in the pound. At the same time twas agreed that it is the sense of the Vestry that no person shall be admitted into this town by way of Inoculation for the smallpox after Thursday next.

## **Shipston-on-Stour**

Eighteenth century Shipston-on-Stour was a market town with about 200 households; like other areas Shipston had suffered from the epidemics of smallpox for example in 1744; it is not surprising then they feared the disease.

Inoculation did not prevent epidemics as many could not afford the procedure; when Smallpox affected poor people, there was the potential that they would become a burden on the Overseers of the Poor. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that the Overseers agreed to attempt to reduce this burden through subsidising a programme of inoculation of their parishioners. Each inoculation, although costing 6s a head, may have prevented years of support for individuals blinded or prevented from working by the disease.

## **Development of Vaccination**

In the 1790's vaccination was developed by Edward Jenner as a less dangerous method of protection against Smallpox. He observed that people in rural areas and particularly those in contact with cattle seemed to have a natural defence against smallpox. He surmised that having suffered from cowpox, a less potent, related disease, they were protected against smallpox. He therefore began inoculating against smallpox using cowpox. His method however took several decades to become the accepted form of protection against Smallpox.

The Vaccination Act of 1840 however demonstrated that the government backed safer vaccination method; they banned the use of inoculation with smallpox itself and made infant vaccinations free of charge. In 1853 it made vaccination compulsory for all children in their first year and fined parents for neglecting to protect their children. In 1867 an amendment allowed for conscientious objection to vaccination as it was still not universally accepted. By 1889 there were 111 anti-vaccination societies who published newsletters and staged protests, seeing the vaccination process as useless.

By 1967 however smallpox was seen as an ideal candidate for eradication by the World Health Organisation and cases were tracked down and isolated, alongside continued programmes of vaccination. In 1977 the last natural case of Smallpox was recorded and by 1980 its eradication was evident.

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