

## 1833 November Scarborough Corporation Trial

Two of His Majesty's commissioners, Dwarris and Rumball were appointed as judge and jury to inquire into the state of the corporations. Facing them to answer questions was a committee consisting of

- John W Woodall (town clerk)
- John Woodall (bailiff)
- William Thornton (bailiff)
- Edward Hebden (coroner)
- Henry Fowler (coroner)
- Anthony Beswick
- William Travis
- Edward Donner (corporation's solicitor)

Cross-examining this committee was

- Samuel Byron
- John Hesp
- G Davies
- William Page

After the council published its own version of these events it provoked Dwarris and Rumball to publish the correct report, proving to be the most damning review of the town. Since 1811 the town committee consisted mostly of family groups all bent on filling their own boots. Samuel Byron stated "*the council was unfit and improper*" William Travis however replied that "*Samuel Byron tried to get his own brother admitted to the council*". At this point Dwarris intervened stating "*this was an enquiry into a system, not an investigation of personal character even though the manner of election may cause suspicion*" Samuel Byron replies "*There was political favouritism in the choice of council offices, the newly-appointed Pinder got his post only by voting for colonel Trench*" while William Page alleged John Woodall fined a policeman only 5s for a most brutal assault on a tradesman's wife in her own house because John Woodall was 'blue' (Tory).

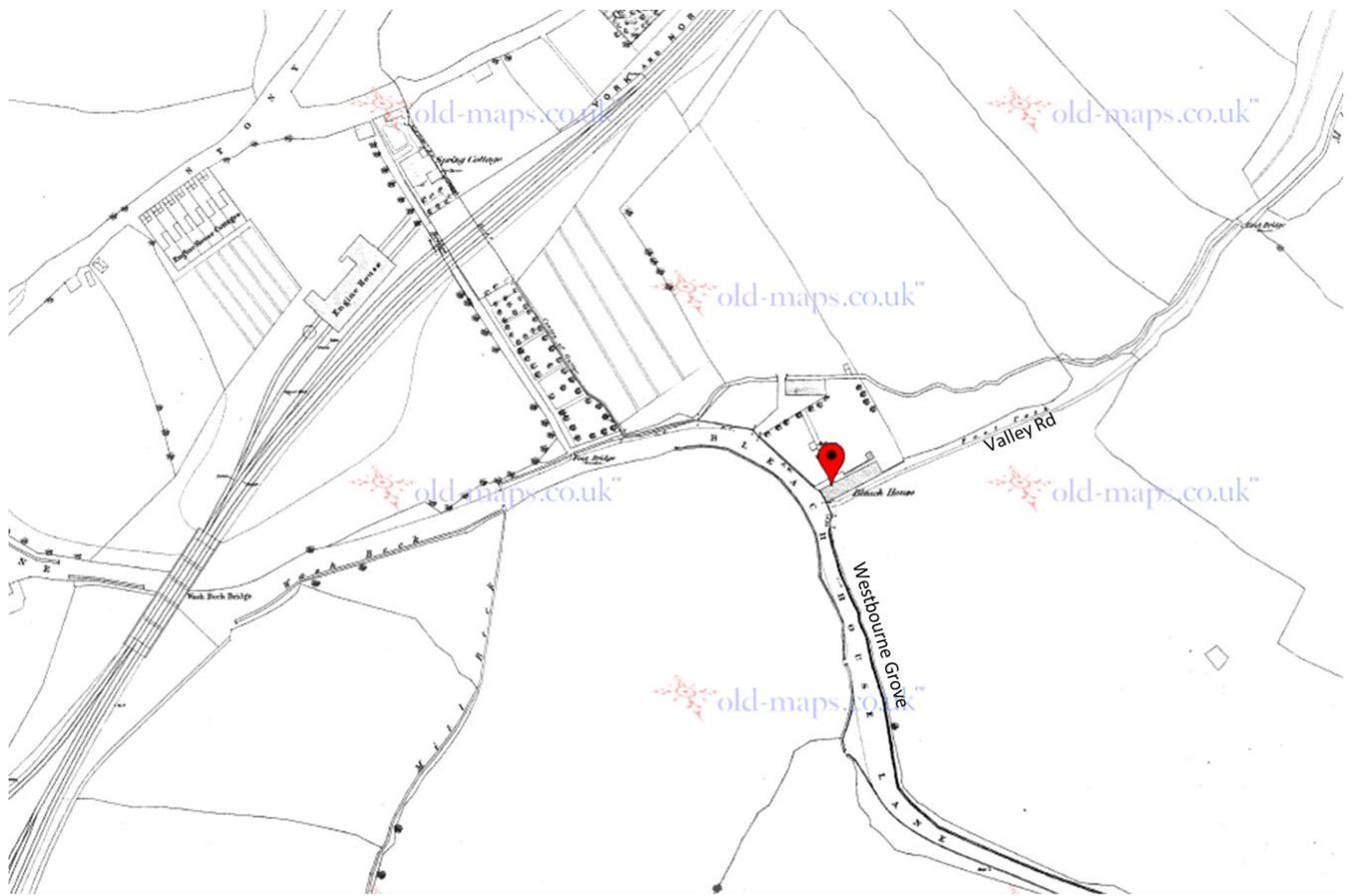
Samuel Byron asked the committee to account for the expenditure of £37 during the election of 1832. William Travis explained the money had been distributed amongst 'the poor' with this Samuel Byron exploded with anger "Well, he said, that is the greatest mockery on the word charity that I have ever heard" was it not distributed to 18 publicans who all had 2 guineas each. All that William Travis could say in reply was that "by poor he had meant the populace". According to Samuel Byron even the granting of publicans' licences was rigged. He cited the case of a new licence recently given to Bleach House because the premises was owned by a member of the corporation. Henry Fowler declared there where no personal favour in granting the licence 'it was granted for the public good being in the road to the Mere' Samuel Byron replied saying 'Much the same as Driffild is in the road to York



Bleach House (Crown Tavern)

The commissioners report a healthy balance in the borough finances with an annual income £1,015, and an annual expenditure £850. (profit of £165). A more detailed investigation revealed some alarming facts about both sides of the audit. Money received from coal shipments amounted to more than £500 a year which exceeded expenditure on the harbour

Samuel Byron asked "whether the surplus had been spent on 'eating and drinking and other such useful purposes'"



1852 Bleach House

But William Travis's reply that *"the old harbour was kept in good repair"* was so softly spoken that it was entirely lost to the audience. The truth was that Vincent pier and the island piers, for which the corporation was directly responsible, were in a 'disgraceful' condition. The committee had to confess the poor state of the town gaol and the house of correction. William Travis admitted that neither had exercise yards or garden. Edward Donner agreed that the house of correction was a place of solitary confinement. William Page said that *"the stench there was 'abominable'"*. The commissioners wrote that both prison and house of correction were very much out of repair and extremely unhealthy. They made no comment on what they called 'another place of confinement called the black-hole'.

Sales of corporation lands to the value of £1,834 had been sold only by private agreement and without public advertisement or competition. Four of the purchasers were councillors, Mr Davies said if the corporation continued to sell property it would soon be unable to meet its liabilities, such as debt repayment. To which William Travis replied *"Oh no there is ample property for all purposes"*. It was pointed out that the corporation was often ill-served by the poor returns it received in rent from some of these properties. The whole of St Nicholas Cliff, one of the town's most valuable sites, had been let out for 50 years at 5s a year, the tenant of which was not named, but suspicion aroused that he must have had good friends in the Town Hall. William Page asked why he had to pay rent to St Thomas's church which had not existed for nearly 200 years, he was told *"all the houses on the west side of Tanner Street, with back doors opening on to what had been St Thomas's churchyard had to pay for the privilege, the annual return to the Town Hall for these rents amounted to £3 18s. 1d"*

William Travis in a quite voice admitted to Samuel Byron that the accounts were audited privately and not circulated even amongst the members. Samuel Byron responded by saying that many members of the Common Hall never saw them; a dozen large folios were laid on the table during the meeting when other business was proceeding; and if he had tried to examine them he would be sent to Coventry. At that point, a 'distinguished personage' on the corporation benches grumbled, 'You're there already against the old corporation and its members and supporters.'