

RATE BOOKS

Records of payments of parish rate set each Easter and collected twice a year. People paying would not be in receipt of relief. Also included may be payments of money made to individuals but sometimes food was dispensed instead of money.

VESTRY MEETINGS

Usually held fortnightly, usually open so anyone could attend and listen to what was being said but sometimes closed. Usually dealt with individuals. In attendance might be the churchwardens, constable, surveyor and overseer. Sometimes these people might hold more than one position.

BONDS OF INDEMNIFICATION OR BASTARDY BONDS

Women who became pregnant outside of marriage were very likely to lose their jobs and may, of course, die in child birth. These children and their mothers, if still alive, became the responsibility of the parish unless the officials could find out who the father was. If the father was discovered he would have to sign a Bond of Indemnification, commonly known as Bastardy Bonds, stating that he would take responsibility for the child. Parish Councils took these matters seriously as if they could not identify the father they became responsible financially for mother and child. The mother would be cross examined before a magistrate or sometimes by the midwife during labour.

Bastardy Bonds and/or records of a woman's examination are among the records that would be found in the parish chest records. After 1834, with the changes to the laws and the introduction of Poor Law Unions, these bonds would be found in the Quarter Session records, if the illegitimate child's mother made application for such a bond.

The Parish or the child's father would be responsible for the child's welfare at the longest until age 14, at which time the child would be able to work and support himself or herself. On average fathers were required to pay between 2 and 5 shillings a week.

Other records in this category:

Notice of Application for Bastardy Order – the pregnant woman would send to the father advising him of the application which would occur at the next Quarter Session. These applied after the 1834 changes to the Poor Law

Bastardy Warrant – in which parish constables were required to find the named father and bring him before the magistrate, or to find a father who has not met his obligations under the bond he signed

Bastard Recognisance – which carried the case over to the next Quarter Sessions and ordered the father to appear there by which time the child presumably would have been born.

Bastardy Summons – by which a constable was obliged to bring the alleged father to court

Bastardy Order – which detailed who was to pay and what

Bastardy Certificate – in which the father was released from the recognisance because he had paid all that was required.

Apprenticeship Records

In the normal course of events it was the child's father who placed him or her in an apprenticeship, the Parish Council or the Overseers of the Poor also were known to handle this for pauper children. It was a matter of finance; it was less expensive to place a child in an apprenticeship than to bring him up. Children could be apprenticed as young as 7 and usually by the time they were 10. The Overseer would choose the master/mistress who could pay a fine to be excused taking on an apprentice. A fee would be paid and an agreement drawn up one held in parish chest and the other given to the family if there was one.

There may be a reference to the child in the minutes to a vestry meeting, when the child was discussed and it was decided to place him in an apprenticeship.

An apprenticeship could be ended, other than at the end of the term, by mutual consent, if the apprentice was badly treated or the apprentice married.

Apprenticeship records are also kept by relevant Guilds and can be searched on-line

Settlement and Removal Orders

Everyone had a place of legal settlement. This was usually where their father was born, or if illegitimate where they were born. If an apprentice, where they were serving their apprenticeship or if in work had they worked there for more than a year. When a woman got married she took on her husband's legal place of settlement but if widowed could revert to her original parish if she did not meet other criteria ie been in the parish a long time. If rent was more than £10 also entitled to legal settlement and if elected to parish office then you could stay.

From 1697 a certificate would be produced of place of legal settlement and when someone new moved into a parish they may be asked by the overseer to hand over the certificate. They certainly would be asked for it if they subsequently needed parish relief.

Parish were responsible for taking care of the poor and the aged within their boundaries. They also assessed rates, or taxes, to take care of many other public functions. This meant that when a new family arrived in the parish and shortly afterwards asked for assistance under the Poor Laws, parish officials often sought to have the individuals removed to the parish they had come from, on the grounds that the new parish was not responsible for them.

This meant that individuals who had been living within a particular parish for many years who suddenly fell upon hard times could be subject to questioning by the local officials as to how long they had lived there and what sort of ties they had that could prove that when they moved there their intention was to take up permanent residence there. A set of rules were developed to decide who could be removed and who should stay.

Individuals were known to use apprenticeship records from a number of years before, or other documents showing intention to reside in a location and be a contributing member of that society, in an attempt to prove that they belonged in that parish.

Removal order meant that the local constable was issued an order to escort the family being sent away from the parish to what had been determined to be their legal place of settlement under the Poor Laws. Settlement orders, of course, allowed the person to stay in the parish.

This way of proceeding, naturally, discouraged those who were poor from moving to another parish in search of work, as if they had reason to call upon the local parish for assistance at any time after moving there, they would either have to prove that they were entitled to settle there, or be removed back to their home.

MILITIA RELIEF ORDER

Any man aged 18 to 25 who was fit could be directed to serve in the militia. They also served in this country.

VAGRANCY ORDERS – basically like removal orders. Vagrants could be moved from parish to parish

SCOTLAND – records can be accessed on Scotland's People

The Presbyterian Church was the Scottish 'national' church and operated in much the same manner as the Church of England in terms of its function as an arm of the state in regulating local affairs. The terminology used, however, is different, due to the different church system.

The principal document of interest to genealogists in the parish chest records are the Kirk Session records. A Kirk Session was the body which dealt, among other things, with disciplinary matters in the local parish and operated as a form of 'church court'. Composed of a local minister who served as moderator and a number of elders the kirk sessions dealt with the investigation of illegitimate birth, including interrogations of unwed pregnant women. Other types of behaviours warranting disciplinary action included, fornication, adultery, drunkenness, swearing, breaking the Sabbath and quarrelling.

Those found to have committed such infractions often were called up before the congregation to stand on the cuttie-stool while their behaviour was publicly announced and rebuked and they were enjoined to forsake their wanton behaviour. Fines were imposed on those with guilt. Monies collected was used to assist the poor – another area which the Kirk Sessions oversaw. Though the cuttie stool is normally a three legged stool in the church it was usually a slightly raised platform on which those accused would stand. Another sort of punishment which seems peculiarly Scottish was the use of the 'joug', when this punishment was meted out an individual was required to spend a certain number of hours with his neck enclosed in a metal ring on a chain fixed to the outer wall of a church.

The Minutes of the Kirk sessions may also contain reference to individuals of other faiths who misbehaved in the parish.

These have been released this year on scotlandspeople.gov.uk

MISCELLANEOUS

Other things that could be found in the parish chest include:

Communion rolls

Seat rent book

Poor relief accounts

Family papers in some cases documenting land transaction, dowries and other legal papers of wealthy families over a number of centuries.

Registers of will or testaments and records of writs

Records of monumental inscriptions