

PARISH CHEST, POOR LAW, CRIMINAL AND ASYLUM RECORDS

Week 6 - 2021

Pre 1066 onwards – Tithe and Glebe Terrier accounts kept in parish chest

At the time of the Reformation it was mandated that all parishes in England, Wales and Ireland should have parish chests with a hole in the top for alms and three locks. The keys were held by the clergyman, church warden and a religious lay person who all had to be present for the chest to be opened.

1361 – Justices of the Peace Act – enshrined the role in protecting the public and punishment of offenders

1547 – Statute of Legal Settlement. Sturdy beggars could be branded or made slaves for 2 years. It also stated that cottages for the impotent poor until relieved or cured.

1552 – parish registers of the poor were introduced so that there was an official record of those who fell into the category of 'poor'

1563 – Act of Relief of the Poor - Justices of the Peace were authorised and empowered to raise compulsory funds for the relief of the poor and, for the first time, the poor were put into different categories.

- Those who would work but could not: these were the able-bodied or deserving poor. They were to be given help either through outdoor relief or by being given work in return for a wage.
- Those who could work but would not: these were the idle poor. They were to be shipped through the streets publicly until they learned the error of their ways.
- Those who were too old/ill/young to work; these were the impotent or deserving poor. They were to be looked after in almshouses, hospitals, orphanages or poor houses. Orphans and children of the poor were to be given a trade apprenticeship so that they would have a trade to pursue when they grew up.

1572 – the first compulsory local poor law tax was imposed making the alleviation of poverty a local responsibility. Beggars could be branded

1576 – Setting the Poor to Work Act

1597 – Justices of the Peace were empowered to raise compulsory funds for the poor and the post of 'Overseer of the Poor' was created. The position continued after the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. **1601** – Poor Law Relief Act -

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1611 – provision of a house of correction

1662 – Settlement Act – stipulated that if a poor person (that is a resident of a tenancy with a taxable value less than £10 per year, who did not fall under the other protected categories) remained in the parish for forty days of undisturbed residency, he could acquire 'settlement rights' in that parish. Repealed by the Poor Law Act of 1927

1697 – Second Settlement Act Certificates would be collected by Overseers when someone moved into the Parish. This was amended in 1795 only collected if become chargeable to the parish. Also required badges to be worn on the right shoulder by people in receipt of poor law.

1722 - Poor Relief Act – mandated parishes to provide workhouses

1723 – Board of Guardians appointed – they were responsible for ensuring workhouses were provided.

1732-44 – various Acts applying to rules regarding provision for illegitimate children

1782 – Gilbert unions – it provided a simple procedure for groups of parishes to set-up workhouses for the poor and able-bodied adults. It also introduced Boards of Guardians to regulate and run workhouses

1834 – Poor Law Amendment Act - This tightened the rules surrounding out-door relief and tightened the rules on workhouses which were to make the conditions in them such that it was the last resort for the poor or infirm.

1836 – Commutation of Tithing Act 1836

1844 Poor Law Amendment Act – prohibited out-door relief except in special circumstances

1848 District Schools Act - gave the Poor Law Commissioners power to combine parishes and unions and to establish residential schools

1854 – Youthful Offenders Act – eventually became Approved Schools

1857 – Industrial Schools Act – allowed magistrates to send disorderly children to an industrial school

1876 – allowed for day schools to be created and placed a duty on parents to send their children to school. Poor Law Guardians could pay the fees.

1904 – Birth records could no longer say born in a workhouse but give the address ie St Pancras Workhouse shown as 4 Kings Road, St Pancras

1913 – All workhouses were officially renamed Poor Law Institutions though they were commonly still known as workhouses

TITHE AND GLEBE TERRIER ACCOUNTS

Tithe accounts and glebe terrier documents from parish chest records can provide information on where your ancestors farmed and how much they were required to pay, in cash or in kind, as a form of tax. The tariff was used to support the local parish church and fund various common responsibilities such as assisting the poor, maintaining roads, and so on.

The phrase “glebe terrier” is an Anglican and Roman Catholic term for the document describing the lands held by the Church in the parish, which the clergyman controlled. They were allocated to him as a means of supporting himself and of maintaining the church. The glebe usually consisted of the church and the graveyard, the manse and bits of lands that the clergyman could rent out to villagers.

In the days before enclosure, fields were divided up into various strips of land for people to farm. The glebe would be allocated various strips of land on different fields. The clergyman was free to farm these strips himself, or to lease them out to villagers.

The clergyman also would take a one-tenth portion of the proceeds of crops and livestock, or money in lieu, as a tariff. Each parish had a tithe account, which formed part of its parish

chest records. Anything that grew out of the land, any livestock that would increase and was nourished by feeding on what grew from the land, animal produce, such as eggs, milk and wool; and the proceeds of man's labour in the production of things from that land, such as lumber from a sawmill, was subject to this tax levy. Tithe Barns were used to store the one-tenth of the harvest.

The practice of collecting a tariff, and maintaining the associated accounts, had been established in England and Wales long before the Norman invasion in 1066 AD. The concept of payment in cash instead of payment "in kind" had gradually come in over the centuries in some parishes. The practice of paying cash instead of giving of the actual harvest was formalised in the Commutation of Tithing Act 1836. The Act required that a tithing map be made, listing all lands in a particular district, and who owned or occupied them. Areas that already were using a commutation system ie accepting cash instead of payment in kind were not mapped. The surveying work was completed between 1841 and 1851.

Three copies of the maps were made. One stayed in the parish church; one went to the archbishop of the diocese; and one went to the Tithing Commissioners. The Commissioners' copies eventually went to the Inland Revenue and are now located at the National Archives at Kew. The church copies are generally at the county Record Office. For Wales the copies from the diocese are in the National Library at Aberystwyth. The maps show who lived in what house, and what buildings and lands they owned, leased and or tilled at the time the survey was done, between 1837 and 1851.

In Ireland after the Reformation the population was still required to pay this levy to support the Anglican Church although most chose to remain Roman Catholic. This led to the Tithe War from 1831 to 1836, during which Irish Catholics refused to pay the required assessments. The government responded by attempting to seize property, a measure which was met with resistance and the loss of lives. The Tithe Commutation Act 1836 reduced the levy and combined it with rental payments, effectively making landlords responsible for remitting the tariff. The system was abolished in 1869 when the Anglican Church in Ireland ceased to be the Church of England. There are no tithe maps of Ireland or of Scotland as a system of payment in cash had long been in place in both countries at the time the Act was passed.

VESTRY MINUTES

A vestry, or parish council, was composed of the parish clergyman, and a number of other worthy parishioners. This was something like a town council today. Essentially, this group had power over the village, along with the Justice of the Peace. The minutes can contain information about what is happening to individuals in the village as well as naming the people on the council. Examples of what could be contained in the minutes includes the care of illegitimate children, people who have come to or left the parish and list of apprenticeships. More on this later.

The village was responsible for the care of the poor, sick and elderly. It also had responsibility for law and order, and for maintenance of roads and bridges. Public services, such as watchmen, lighting, sewers and pest control all were handled at the village level. Records had to be kept of these things.

Records of Surveyors of the Highways

These men were responsible for maintaining roads and bridges within the parish. Often, those who were poor but able-bodied were given the task of picking up stones from the fields. The Surveyors would employ different villagers in these maintenance tasks, using the stones gathered, and kept records of what was done and by whom for what wage. His accounts would be placed in the parish chest.

Parish Constables

The parish constable was chosen from among the villagers and was supervised by the vicar. He was responsible for maintaining law and order, to arrest and detain criminals and to transport them to the magistrate for trial. This was an unpaid, part-time position. The parish constable also kept a list of men eligible to service in the Militia. He was also involved in caring for the poor, sick, aged and vagrants. He would keep records regarding his activities and submit invoices for his expenses.

Churchwarden Accounts

Churchwardens were appointed at the Easter quarter sessions/vestry meetings for a one-year period. At least two men would be appointed, one chosen by the clergyman and one chosen by the villagers.

Churchwardens were responsible for the upkeep of the church and the grounds. They would submit receipts, or vouchers for reimbursement of expenses incurred. Often these included work done in the village by various villagers. In addition churchwardens were responsible to report any wrongdoings that they were aware of among parishioners to the Bishop or magistrate at the quarterly Ecclesiastical Court sessions, including not attending church services, drunkenness or other behaviours considered unsuitable. They were also required to report on any misbehaviour by the vicar and other vestry members.

OVERSEERS OF THE POOR

These were appointed annually by the Justice of the Peace and operated under various poor laws between 1500s and 1834 when new Poor Laws were introduced. They were unpaid. They were responsible for all aspects of the poor law. They looked after sick relief, took care of the aged, provided children of the poor with apprenticeships, found work for the able-bodied among the poor and assisted the local constable in his duties. They also maintained a "house of correction" for vagrants, as well as the poor house. In addition they might deal with desertions, bereavement ie funeral expenses and paying sexton for the grave, property occupancy and movement orders, payments to midwives, travel expenses for the constable, and lists of men eligible for the militia. They were usually tradesmen, farmers or minor gentry.

Records could include overseer's accounts, settlement and removal orders, the care of illegitimate children, poor houses, vagrants, apprenticeships, some of which were voluntary and some of which were not and any other matter relating to the poor.

To pay for all this taxes were imposed to carry out this work and to provide for public services. Records were kept of who paid and how much and who received benefit.