

## A short guide to poor relief before 1834

- ◇ Poor relief was a **parish** responsibility **until 1834**. Officials called **overseers of the poor** were responsible for paying poor relief. They were appointed yearly.
- ◇ The money for poor relief was raised by a poor rate – so it was in the interest of people who lived in the parish to keep the rate as low as possible.
- ◇ To qualify for poor relief, individuals would have to qualify by:
  - \* being born in the parish
  - \* owning or renting freehold land in the parish
  - \* serving an apprenticeship there (7 years)
  - \* serving as a hired servant for 12 months
  - \* paying the local poor rate
  - \* serving as a parish officer
- ◇ If any person **failed to establish residence** they could be **removed** from the parish when they became unable to support themselves.
- ◇ If a person needed poor relief they were interviewed to establish their place of legal settlement. The interview was known as an **examination**. This also happened when people moved into the parish and it was thought likely that at some time they might require relief.
- ◇ The system generated considerable paperwork, including:
  - \* *Settlement examinations* - these provide lots of useful information for family historians
  - \* *Settlement certificates* - which were issued to those who wished to leave their own parish, to show that the parish would take them back if they became in need of poor relief.
  - \* *Removal orders* - these were made when it was necessary to send a poor person back to their place of settlement.
  - \* *Bastardy examinations and orders* – which can help to identify the father of an illegitimate child.
  - \* *Apprenticeship indentures* - these often survive in the parish records as many poor children were apprenticed by the parish.

- ◇ The **period covered** by these records is usually from the **late seventeenth** to the **early nineteenth century**. Their survival is a matter of chance and there are many parishes for which none exist.
- ◇ Most of the settlement examinations, certificates and removal orders and bastardy examinations have been listed individually on our **online catalogue**. This means that you can type in the name of the person you are researching and any existing papers naming that person will be listed. Of course, you may still want to look through the more general sources such as overseers' account books.
- ◇ Most of the records of poor relief before 1834 are found within the **parish records** but it is also worth checking the **Borough Records** for Bridgnorth, Ludlow, Shrewsbury and Wenlock. There are also records for Ellesmere within the Giles and Horton collection 321 (transcript in poor law transcripts folder)
- ◇ Some poor law records are on microfiche. To consult any that are available in the original format only, you need one of our **Readers' Tickets**.
- ◇ **Appeals** against removal orders were heard at the court of Quarter Sessions. The Quarter Sessions order books give a brief summary of each appeal. There is a printed abstract of the order books from 1638.
- ◇ This system of poor relief was geared to meet the needs of a rural population. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more people moved into towns and the system could no longer cope. In 1834 the Poor Law Amendment Act brought in a new system of poor relief, known as the **New Poor Law**. For more information see our *short guide to the poor relief after 1834*.
- ◇ **For more information and a list of records, please see our detailed Guide to the Old Poor Law.**

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