



Devon Family History Society
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Devon Record Office



DEVON RECORD OFFICE

NEWTON ABBOT BASTARDY ORDER BOOK

1844-1860

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In 1844, the Poor Law Amendment Act gave to unmarried mothers, for the first time, the right to apply for maintenance for their child from the putative father, whether or not they were paupers. Prior to 1834, if the mother was in receipt of poor relief, maintenance was claimed from the father by the overseers of the poor of the parish to which the child belonged. From 1844, a woman was required to go before the magistrates at the Petty Sessions for the area where she lived, within a year of the birth of her child, to name its father and give evidence of the truth of her allegation. She was only allowed to claim on behalf of her child; she could claim nothing for herself. If the magistrates decided that the man was indeed the father of the illegitimate child, they would order him to pay a certain sum weekly for the child's maintenance. If they decided that he was not the father, the case was dismissed.

This record of such bastardy orders was drawn up by the magistrates of Teignbridge Petty Sessional Division, although the book was found with the records of Newton Abbot Urban District Council. The jurisdiction of the Petty Sessions covered Newton Abbot itself and many surrounding parishes. Most of these parishes are represented by the places of residence of the mothers: Ashburton, Bickington, Bishopsteignton, Bovey Tracey, Broadhempston, Coffinswell, Hennock, Highweek, Ilsington, Ipplepen, Kingskerswell, Kingsteignton, Marldon, Staverton, Teigngrace, Widecombe, Wolborough and Woodland. The orders cover the dates 1844 to 1860. From 1844 to 1848 inclusive, the mother's name and place of residence and the father's name, occupation and place of residence are all given. However from 1849, the mothers are named, but not their place of residence; the men are named only if they were adjudged to be the putative father, and their trades and residences are not listed.