



Devon Family History Society
Joint Project Publication with
Devon Record Office



DEVON RECORD OFFICE

REGISTER OF VAGRANTS COMMITTED TO GAOL

1820-1822

DRO Reference – QS130/1

DFHS Book Reference - D007

The Register of Vagrants committed to Gaol, 1820-1822 (DRO reference: QS 130/1) is found among the County Quarter Sessions records in Devon Record Office. It serves as a reminder of the treatment that was once meted out to those who were thought to be unwilling to earn an honest living. Vagrants or wanderers were dealt with very harshly. They were apprehended in the city or countryside by constables, who were responsible for making sure the statutes for the punishment of these 'rogues and vagabonds' were carried out.

In 1720 justices sitting in Quarter Sessions were authorised by Act of Parliament to commit vagrants and other minor offenders to either the Bridewell (house of correction) or to the county or city gaol. Some were confined to the workhouse instead. In 1744, the *Rogues, Vagabonds, and other Idle and Disorderly Persons Act* prescribed punishment of up to one month in the "House of Correction" for those who lived idly and refused work or begged. In 1824 the *Vagrants Act* amended the definitions of idle and disorderly persons, rogues and vagabonds; set out powers of searching persons and premises; and prescribed maximum penalties and terms of imprisonment.

Quarter Session papers record vagrants who were taken into custody for wandering and begging, and who were sometimes sentenced to a public whipping. At the end of their sentence they were conveyed or sent back to their place of settlement by a vagrant's pass. This Register begins in June 1820, and ends in July 1822. It records the name of the vagrant, who was in many cases a female, sometimes accompanied by her children; the place of destination to which the vagrant was to be conveyed or sent; and the date on which his or her custodial sentence was to expire. The Register includes vagrants from all over Devon, from many of the counties of England, a reasonable number from Ireland, a few from Scotland and even some small groups of wanderers from Italy and France.

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