



Devon Family History Society
Joint Project Publication with
Devon Record Office



DEVON RECORD OFFICE

CULLMPTON REGISTER OF BASTARDY APPLICATIONS

1850-1859

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An unmarried mother, who was unable to support herself, had to ask for help from the overseers of the poor of her parish of settlement. The overseers would try to recoup the money they spent on her and her baby from the child's father. After the 1834 Poor Law, responsibility for the poor passed from the parish overseers to the Guardians of the Poor of a Poor Law Union, which was a group of about twenty parishes. From this date, an unmarried mother would often be sent to the Union workhouse to have her baby instead of remaining in her own parish. The Guardians of the Poor would try to claim some of their expenses from the child's father just as the overseers of the poor had done.

This system changed in 1844, when The Poor Law Amendment Act gave the mother of an illegitimate child the right to apply to the justices at the local Petty Sessions for an order to the father to pay maintenance for their baby. She was not entitled to ask for maintenance for herself. The application had to be made within twelve months of the child's birth, unless the father had already given a sum of money towards his or her upkeep. If the justices decided that the man named by the mother was indeed the child's father, then the order would be made.

This register of applications was kept by the Cullompton District of Cullompton Division which included the parishes of Burlescombe, Churchstanton, Cullompton, Halberton, Kentisbeare, Silverton, Thorverton and Uffculme. Petty Sessions were held at the Town Hall in Cullompton every other week. The register covers the period from January 1850 to May 1859. The application records the mother's name and residence, the father's name, trade and residence, the date of the Petty Sessions and whether the application was granted or not. The amounts granted to the mother vary from 1/- to 2/6 payable weekly; in addition the father had to pay the costs of the order and, in a few cases, the sum of 10/- to the midwife who assisted at the delivery. Lists of affiliation orders made by the courts were drawn up and submitted to the Devon Quarter Sessions and this series, QS16, 1844-1857, has also been indexed by the DFHS Small Projects Group.