



Devon Family History Society
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Devon Record Office



DEVON RECORD OFFICE

HEAVITREE NUISANCES PRESENTMENT AND INSPECTOR'S RECORD BOOKS

1856-1859

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DFHS Book Reference - D066

The Nuisances' Removal Act was passed in 1855, giving police commissioners the right to have insanitary premises cleaned or closed down.

Parishes or local councils had to appoint an Inspector of Nuisances to check for breaches of the law in their area. Nuisances were any kind of insanitary conditions which could endanger health, so the inspectors had to check living conditions in houses, the state of outside privies and drains, refuse piles and dung heaps, and sheds and yards where animals, such as pigs, were kept. Anything which contravened the act was written down and reported, and then appropriate measures were taken to make sure that matters were put right.

These two books were kept by the inspector of nuisances for the parish of Heavitree, on the outskirts of Exeter. One book is the Presentment Book which records 'particulars of complaint', the name of the inspector and the location of the nuisance. The second book is the Inspector's Record Book which records the actions taken to put the nuisance right. The books cover the period 1856 to 1859, with some later entries for 1862 and 1872, and have to be used in conjunction to get a complete account of each case. They are not a source which is often used for family history because their official title does not give any idea of the content, but as an account of what everyday life was like for ordinary working people, they are full of interest. Heavitree in the 1850s had its share of blocked drains, filthy gutters and dirty pigs and it is easy to see how diseases flourished when hygiene was so poor. However, the books show that the inspector was vigilant in hunting out nuisances and in making sure that Heavitree was clean. He had a thankless task and, with repeat offenders, he must have felt as if it were never-ending, but his efficiency has created a valuable record for us; this index provides the key to his work.