



Devon Family History Society
Joint Project Publication with
Devon Record Office



HOLY TRINITY POOR RELIEF STREET LIST

1848

DRO Reference – 74B/MFS 43

DFHS Book Reference - D076B

The directory was handwritten in a small notebook by the rector of Holy Trinity, the Reverend George Henry Shield MA, in 1846 and 1848. He was born George Henry Orchard Pedlar, only son of Captain George Pedlar and Emma his wife, in Stoke Damerel, Plymouth, in 1817. George became a student at Magdalen Hall, Oxford, gaining an MA in 1841. He was instituted rector of Holy Trinity on 22nd May 1843, presented by the Dean and Chapter of Exeter. Holy Trinity church stood at the bottom of South Street, but only a very small area around James Street, just opposite the church, was in the parish and actually within the city walls. Most of the parish lay outside the walls and here were the Devon and Exeter Hospital and the Female Penitentiary. There were prosperous areas in the parish, such as the southern end of Southernhay, Magdalen Road and parts of Holloway Street, but Holy Trinity also included the poor and overcrowded area which lay between Combe Street, Holloway Street and the quay.

On 11th February 1845, George was married by the Dean of Exeter to Ann, the only child of Admiral William Shield and his wife Jane. On marriage, George changed his name by Royal Licence from Pedlar to Shield. The couple did not have children and they remained at Holy Trinity until Ann's death in 1875, when George retired to Dawlish. He died in 1883.

This directory was drawn up when George Shield had been rector for just over two years. It has survived in the papers of Burrow & Co., a firm of solicitors in Cullompton, who were the Shield family lawyers. The late 1840s were hard times for labourers in Exeter. The building work in the city was coming to an end, the winter of 1845 was a harsh one and in 1847 the price of wheat soared, leading to the bread riots of May that year. The Corporation of the Poor had to provide relief for a far greater number of people than usual and the situation became so bad that in 1846 a Famine Fund was set up to help the destitute.

The first part of George Shield's notebook is an alphabetical index of the poor in Holy Trinity parish. The main breadwinner is listed with brief details of dependents, and then there is a street address, followed by notes on the family's income. A second survey was carried out on 28th and 29th January 1848, when Rev. Shield made a personal visit to every house. He classified the families into five categories according to their income and their ability to work. In this second part of the book, the families are listed by street, in the order that Rev. Shield visited them. He notes the name of

the breadwinner and his occupation, and brief details of the family's personal circumstances. Lastly, there are two columns, the first for the number of loaves of bread given to the family and the second for the number of people in the family. After the two days, the total number of people relieved was 547. It is not clear who was providing the loaves and it is possible that this was a private charity of George and Ann Shield to meet the needs of the poor in their parish.