



Devon Family History Society
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LITTLEHAM EXMOUTH PAROCHIAL LIST OF PAUPERS

MICHAELMAS 1871

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Parishes in England and Wales were responsible for the care of infirm or destitute parishioners, raising money through poor rates imposed on the wealthier inhabitants which was used to buy goods and services for the poor. The system was administered in each parish by two overseers who were chosen each year, usually on a rota basis, with the owner or tenant of every farm or smallholding in the parish taking a turn. Exeter was different in that an act of parliament was passed in 1698, enabling the Corporation of the Poor to be set up, which meant that poor relief was administered by the city as a whole and not by individual parishes. Gilbert's Act of 1782 gave all parishes the option of uniting together to dispense poor relief as a group, but in Devon, most parishes acted independently and had their own systems for caring for their poor. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 changed all this by discarding the parochial system and in its place, formed Poor Law Unions, each made up of a group of about twenty parishes. Poor relief was now organised in each Union by Guardians of the Poor who met on a regular basis to oversee the relief of paupers in the Union. They appointed paid Relieving Officers to operate the day to day administration of relief in the parishes. Large workhouses were built, one for each Union, which took the place of the parish poorhouses. Life in the Union Workhouses was deliberately made unattractive to discourage idleness and to encourage the poor to find work to support themselves and their families.

Littleham, Exmouth, was part of St Thomas poor law union and kept lists, drawn up every Lady day and Michaelmas, of the parishioners who were living in the union workhouse and those who were in receipt of out-relief. The lists survive from 1851 to 1872, but the series is incomplete. The lists of those in the workhouse in St Thomas contain the paupers' names and the number of days they had been in the workhouse during the last half year. The list of out-door poor is much longer, reflecting the fact that most people were cared for in their own homes. The names are listed in alphabetical order, together with the reason that the paupers received relief and the amount of money given to them. There is a column on the form for the residence of any pauper living outside the parish of Littleham, but it seems to have been unusual for Littleham paupers to be relieved away from home and in practice, very few people come into this category.