



Devon Family History Society
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HONITON UNION LIST OF PAUPERS

LADY DAY 1901

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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.

The lists which are indexed here were published half-yearly by Honiton Union and record the names of paupers who had been taken into the union workhouse in Honiton and those lived outside the workhouse, but were in receipt of poor relief. These lists survive for 1881/2 and 1884 - 1907. The paupers are listed by parish in alphabetical order of surname, first the parishes in the Honiton district of the Union and then the parishes in Ottery St Mary and Sidmouth district. Under each parish heading are listed first the people who had been moved to the workhouse and the number of days they had been there, and then those living outside, with the sums of money given to them. Those living outside the workhouse have been given a code number to indicate why they needed help: 1. means old age, 2. total disability, 3. sickness etc of family or funeral, 4. widows with families, 5. orphans living with relatives, and 6. insane persons and idiots. Apart from 1881/2, all the returns list paupers living in one of the parishes in Honiton Union but chargeable elsewhere. They received what was termed 'non-resident relief'. The same code numbers have been given to these people as were

used for those chargeable to Honiton Union. From 1891, the lists also include the names and parishes of paupers who were charged to the Union 'lunatic account' and the names of the pauper children who were in institutions for the blind or deaf and paid for by Honiton Union.