

RESEARCHING YOUR FAMILY HISTORY

The Poor Law and Wills

The Poor Law



Elizabethan Poor Law

- 1601
 - ▣ a compulsory poor rate to be levied on every parish
 - ▣ the creation of 'Overseers' of relief
 - ▣ the 'setting the poor on work'
 - ▣ the collection of a poor relief rate from property owners

Elizabethan Poor Law

- **The duties of the Overseers were to**
 - work out how much money would be needed for the relief of the poor and set the poor rate accordingly
 - collect the poor rate from property owners
 - relieve the poor by dispensing either food or money
 - supervise the parish poor-house

Elizabethan Poor Law

- **Two types of relief were available**
 - **Outdoor relief**
 - **Indoor relief**

1662 Act of Settlement

- be born into a parish where the parents had a settlement
- up to 1662, live in a parish for more than three years; after 1662 a person could be removed within 40 days of arrival and after 1691, a person had to give 40 days' notice before moving into a parish
- be hired continually by a settled resident for more than a year and a day
- hold parish office
- rent property worth more than £10 p.a. OR pay taxes on a property worth more than £10 p.a.
- have married into the parish
- previously have received poor relief in that parish
- have served a full seven-year apprenticeship to a settled resident

18th Century Poor Law

- Knatchbull's Act (1723) — the Workhouse Test Act
- Gilbert's Act (1782)
- The Speenhamland System (1795)

Poor Law Records

- ▣ Parish Overseers' Accounts
- ▣ Churchwardens' Accounts
- ▣ Vestry Minutes
- ▣ Settlement Records
- ▣ Bastardy Documents
- ▣ Apprenticeship Records
- ▣ Corporate Records

19th Century

‘Hideous slums, some of them acres wide, some no more than crannies of obscure misery, make up a substantial part of the metropolis

… In big, once handsome houses, thirty or more people of all ages may inhabit a single room.’

From “The Victorian underworld”
by Kellow Chesney

19th Century

- 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act
 - ▣ Poor Law Unions
 - ▣ Should be 'less eligible' (less desirable) than those of an independent labourer of the lowest class
 - ▣ The appointment of a central body to administer the new system

Useful Web Sites

- <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/poorlaw/poorlawov.html>
- <http://www.workhouses.org.uk>

20th Century

- 1st April 1930 : Workhouse system abolished

Records

- Local Workhouse Records
- Workhouse Correspondence held at the National Archive.
- <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/podcasts/workhouse.htm>

Wills and Probate

In the name of god amen
I Sarah Clayton of Waddell County in the
state of North Carolina being in a bad state
of health but thanks be to god am in sound
mind and memory do make this my last will and
testament and first & last my soul unto god
who gave it me and my body I recommend to the
god I have to be buried in a Christian and decent
manner at the discretion of my Executors
I give and bequeath all my worldly Estate I gave and
I
Sarah Clayton

Finding Wills – 1858 Onwards

Example

1884 Timms, Gregory 5 May. The will of Gregory Timms late of Rose Cottage, High St, Dover, Kent ... bootmaker who died 7 Jan 1884 at Rose Cottage was proved at the Principal Registry by John Timms of 124, Briargate, Dover ... Schoolmaster, the Son of the sole executrix. Effects, £94.

Wills before 1858:

- Managed by Church Courts
- Prerogative Court of Canterbury indexes (1383-1858) on the National Archives
- The rest all over the place see
 - www.dur.ac.uk/a.r.millard/genealogy/probate.php