Researching Our Pauper Ancestors – Clare O'Grady

Our Chairman, Chris Broom, welcomed members and guests to our June talk at the Fromus Centre in Saxmundham. Clare O'Grady Msc, QG, gave an excellent presentation to help us find out about Pauper Ancestors.



Poor relief in 1536 was the legal responsibility of each parish, and in 1597/8 parish householders had to pay a poor rate levy. Poor Law Unions were also created, so information could be found in their records and also those of the parishes. The poor could claim relief because of illness, unemployment or old age, and their names were recorded in the vestry (church) minutes, in overseers' accounts, or in a poor book. Extra information was also recorded. Clare showed examples of these records that she had found. Outdoor Relief was given during the 17th and 18th centuries, consisting of money, food, clothing and other goods, allowing people to stay in their own homes. The able-bodied worked on road maintenance, boundaries, ditches, etc. and women looked after the sick.

People were only allowed to claim relief in their home parish, and to stop people moving around to claim in several parishes the 1601 Settlement Act came in, so people had to be legally settled and had to comply with certain conditions. Parish officials examined newcomers under oath and gave a certificate, copies of which may still be found in the records of larger parishes. Settlement examination records can be found in Union records after 1834.

In 1834 compulsory indoor relief in workhouses was created with boards of guardians overseeing them. Entry into a workhouse was voluntary and the able-bodied were set to work. The Overseer would seek to find them work outside the workhouse. Records pre 1834 can be found in the parish chest. Incorrect behaviour saw the miscreants fed only bread and water back at the workhouse. Workhouses were inspected regularly. Paupers could leave the workhouse if they had housing and work to go to.

Poor children in a parish from the age of seven were often bound as apprentices to nearb farmers or tradesmen, the agreemer being recorded in the Vestry minut books, Overseers accounts or paris registers. Licences for sailors an



The Plomesgate Workhouse at Framlingham Castle
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also vagrants were held in the paris chest. Vagrants were divided int "Idle and Disorderly", "Rogues an Vagabonds" or "Incorrigible Rogues and information for these may als be found in JP records and Quarte Sessions records.

Clare showed us that there ar several places to seek informatio to add to that found in the censu Local history groups or museums ma have information about workhouse in their area, and perhaps you migh see an actual parish chest in a church although the records may be hel elsewhere.

Jenny Mann



The Wangford Workhouse at Shipmeadow
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