

ART. IV.—*Poor Relief in Cumberland in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.* By FRANCIS GRAINGER.

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UNTIL the Dissolution of the Monastic Houses the poor were looked to by them, but before Henry VIII. died the first enactments were passed in regard to Poor Law. The area chosen finally settled down to be the Township and so continued until 80 years ago. The rates were levied by the Vestry, or, where the Manor Court was still powerful, by the head jury, the collectors being the constables of each township; and the Justices either in Petty or Quarter Sessions were appealed to in case of need. The constable or bailiff also collected the fines or verdicts levied by the Manor Court, and this seems to have been his earliest employment, in addition to Manor fines and requirements. The farmer in Stuart times had to contribute towards the expenses and repair of his parish church, the overseers in this case being joined by the churchwardens.

The first Poor Law enactment fixed the contributors as “every inhabitant.” It is clear that, until the Restoration, country parishes did not levy any rate, but the poor went from door to door in their parish and all contributed in turn to their maintenance. In 1636 the parish of Holm Cultram raised their contribution of £9 6s. od. ship-money by assessing a “taske,” “that every horse-place in this lords^p pay xd.; every demy, xd., and every footeplace, iiiid.; and every cottager of ability and able, iiiid.; and those that be less able to pay, at the discretion of two honest men being neighbours, and of every young man at the discretion of the constables and of us.” Later, the rates and taxes were levied by

the Purvey Rate. One purvey was £100, levied over the whole county; of the wards, Allerdale above Derwent contributed £33 6s. 8d., Allerdale below Derwent £16 13s. 4d., Leath Ward £20 16s. 8d., Eskdale £12 10s. od., Cumberland £16 13s. 4d. This continued to be the basis of county taxation and rating until 1810, when the first County Rating Act was passed. This was, of course, a very low rate per individual, and the rate was generally so many "purveys" as were required to raise the necessary sum. King James I., in 1617, observing the poverty of Cumberland, condescended to compound his prerogative for £100; hence the same, having been appointed throughout the county, obtained the appellation of Purvey Rate (Hutchinson's *Hist. of Cumberland*, vol. ii., p. 684).

That Cumberland was poor at that time is evidenced by the ship money assessment, which in 1636 was as follows:—Cumberland, £800 or £1 in 1251.91 acres; Westmorland, £600 or £1 in 809.53 acres; Middlesex, £20,180 or £1 in 8.629 acres; average for all England, £1 in 180.331 acres. Towards the end of the reign of Charles II., poor rate to acreage was in Cumberland, £4,988 or £1 in 200.73 acres; Westmorland, £1,890 or £1 in 256.84 acres. In 1649, a tax was levied over all England at the rate of £90,000 a month for six months, for the maintenance of the Scotch army, and Cumberland contributed £115 10s. 2½d. or £1 in 8,631.66 acres; Westmorland, £99 13s. 9¾d. or £1 in 4,854.32 acres; Middlesex, £2,282 16s. 7½d. or £1 in 22.13 acres. In 1660 an assessment was proposed in lieu of Wardship, the figures being:—Cumberland, £400 or £1 in 2,503 acres; Westmorland, £300 or £1 in 1,618 acres; Middlesex, £3,000 or £1 in 60.05 acres. The assessment for Land Tax in 1693 stood:—Cumberland, £3,174 or £1 in 315 acres; Westmorland, £3,014 or £1 in 161 acres; Middlesex, £307,140 or £1 in .586 acres; Northumberland, £25,107 or £1 in 74 acres. The earliest record I can find of rating for the poor is as follows:—

Holm Cultra[m] December 12th Año 1640. We the Sixteen Men whose names are underwritten doe assess the Taske for the weeklie rates of viiid a weeke for y^e relief of y^e prisoners in goale, Kings Bench & Marshallsie, for the relieve of Soldiers maimed in his Ma'ties Service, w^{ch} Taske being in toto xxxiiij^s & viij^d assessed by the Justices of peace upon this Lor^{pp} for the yeare bye past. Now we order the same to be collected & payed to the Constables in manner following viz. ijs for ev^{re} able Tenant for ev^{re} owdie [other] Tenem^t rs and 1d of ev^{re} lesser Tenem^t & able cottager.

| | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| John Osmotherlie | John Jackson |
| Anthonie Barwis | Anthonie Austin |
| Thomas Sealbie | Anthony Watson |

Again, at a Quarter Sessions held at Penrith, 7th October 1662, we read :—

Whereas the Inhabitants of Holme Cultrā have for sev'all yeares last past maynteyned amongst them a poore Boy one Ralph Roberts of wth charge one Rob^t Parker uncle to y^e said child did engage to ease them, the which he hath yet neglected to doe. Ordered thereupon on y^e Petition of the s^d Inhabitants That y^e two next Justices call the parties before them & order the p'misses as they shall thinke fitt. Given in open Court holden the day & yeare abovesaid.

Guy Briscoe.

Ordered upon hearing & examination of ye reference abovesaid That Robert Parker Uncle to y^e Boy Ralph Roberts shall pay y^e sum of ffive pounds for to putt him to an Apprentice by ye Churchwardens & Overseers of y^e Parish. Given under our handes the xijth of January 1663.

R^t Tolson.

Rob^t Highmoor.

December y^e 12th 1664. We the said xvi men whose names are subscribed to y^e p'ceeding order doe Agree and order that there shall be Tenne Shillings assessed levyed & Collected wthin ye Lor^{pp} for & towards the buying of Cloathes for William Austin a poore blind man and that y^e same be so assessed & collected with y^e next Taske that comes to be payed for this Lor^{pp}.

June ye ffifth day 1666. Ordered y^e day and y^e yeare abovesaid that there shall be payed to Elizabeth Langcake and Jane Dand being two feeble and impotent women for and towards their maintenance the sume of ffortie shillings and that y^e same be payed after y^e rate of 5/- in the Quarter to each of them.

Elizabeth Langcake disclaiming her p'portion, the whole redounds to Jane Dand. Francis Grainger & others.

Apparently, it was only when the poor person could not walk "to seek his living" that relief was given. Sometimes the poor person appealed to Quarter Sessions. Thus, on July 4th, 1670, and 21st January, 1698, the appellants were granted 12d. per week, and this sum seems to have been considered the proper amount for some years. But a few years later we see the allowance reduced to 6d. a week. If the Tenants did not keep the poor according to custom—"every horseplace 2 dayes, at every Demy, foote place & Lessors one day"—means were taken to collect an equivalent ; and this was 6d. per day.

Paupers in receipt of relief in their parishes were to be marked.

9th Oct. 1700. Order be given to the Petty Constables requiring them to cause good & careful ward to be kept constantly in the daytime from sunrise to sunset by two able men in all & every the most noted places & wayes wthin their respective Constableness to charge them to arrest all rogues, vagabonds and such as begg out of their respective parishes in the high way and cause them to be whipped or bring them before some Justice of the Peace to be committed to the House of Correction. Also to cause & see that every person in their respective parishes who receive Alms of the Parish hang upon the shoulder of their right sleeve of their uppermost garment in an open & visible manner a Badge & mark viz. a large Roman "P." together with the first letter of their Parish & that no person not having a badge shall receive alms.

In 1689, the poor rate in Holm Cultram was £13 17s. 4d. There is little information as to the administration of the poor rate until the latter half of the 18th century ; but in 1765 it was agreed to open a house as a Workhouse for the poor—"as they are become so numerous" ; the Tenant of the Parish farm being paid £2 2s. for opening part of his house for this purpose. Prior to this time an agreement had been entered into between "The Chapelwardens and overseers of the poor with the consent of the principal Inhabitants of the town of Whitehaven & Parish of St.

Bees," who had lately built a large and commodious Workhouse or Poorhouse "for the lodging maintaining and employing their poor therein," and the parish of Holm St. Cuthberts. The terms were to pay thirty shillings a year for house-rent, "and also such other sums of money for the maintenance and employment and for physick for such of the poor monthly as shall be sent thither and for the master's wages and to be allowed what the earnings of the poor amounts unto."

In the earliest records an "overseer" of the poor was appointed yearly, and up to the passing of the Poor Law, which substituted the Union as the unit instead of the parish, the duty of overseeing the poor was no sinecure. The collection of the poor rates was a cumbrous process in itself, being based on so many times 12/5, which was the contribution of Holm Cultram towards £100 levied over the County. The following items from the account of my grandfather, who was overseer of his parish in 1791, may be interesting. Only out-of-pocket expenses could be claimed—not even third-class railway fare. Then a journey to Carlisle cost 4/-; a trip to Maryport "for myself and horse," 1/6; a journey to Carlisle to meet Rockliffe overseer 5/-. These two Carlisle journeys must have included fees paid, for the "expenses of John Winder and myself to Carlisle" only came to 2/6.

The following list of the payments in 1791 show the varied duties devolving on the overseer:—

| | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|----|----|---|
| Meeting at Abbey, Binding Cogtons boy apprentice | | | | | | |
| to Jos. Rigg | | | | | 2 | 6 |
| To William Parker for cloathes for Jane Glaister's | | | | | | |
| girl | | | | | 10 | 0 |
| To Dorothy Parker one quarter's pay | | | | | 16 | 3 |
| To William Tindail for her Board for a week .. | | | | | 2 | 0 |
| To Jos. Rigg, apprentice fee for Cogton's boy .. | | | | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| Hoskin's child, a petticoat | | | | 2 | 1 | |
| Paid Dorothy Parker's child's Funeral | | | | 11 | 6 | |
| John Miller for duffle for Dorothy Parker a bed- | | | | | | |
| gown & petticoat | | | | | 8 | 9 |

| | |
|---|------|
| Solomon Harrison for a letter which came relating to Betty Temple's funeral | 3d. |
| To Betty Harescough for a shift for Dorothy Parker | 3 1½ |
| For sewing the same shift, petticoat & bedgown .. | 1 0 |
| To Esther Gerrard for attending Betty Temple on her deathbed | 9 0 |
| A Journey to Wigton with Mary Huntingdon to father her child on Jos. Wilkinson | 1 6 |
| To Mr. Knibley for a warrant to apprehend Jos. Wilkinson | 2 6 |
| To Jos. Rigg of 1½lb wool for Stockings for Long- cake's boy | 1 0 |
| To a boy's hat & leather apron for Hoskin's boy.. | 2 2 |

Sometimes an overseer had a delicate task allotted him. A certain Sally Kay figures largely in the accounts of 1791. After costing a considerable sum for duffle for herself and "cloathes" for her child, and a threat of legal proceedings against her erring lover, a marriage was arranged ; for the overseer "went to Standing Stone to get a license for Joseph Sewell and Sally Kay." The expenses were 1/6 and the license £1 9s. od. The next day the overseer struck while the iron was hot, for 7/- was paid for executing the marriage, and "expenses at the said marriage" cost 1/8.

In addition, money was to be raised to pay for substitutes for those balloted for the militia*; and for the ballot for a man to serve in the Navy. A list was also kept of those liable and those exempt from these services, both farmers and owners. There was in those days a heavy tax on saddle horses ; the tax-gatherer assumed liability on the part of anyone having a likely horse, and double the tax was charged ; the demand specifying that "the double duty on the within surcharge may be avoided by delivering at any time before the day of appeal a true list of all

* The remuneration of the militia when chosen was fixed by Quarter Sessions. Thus :—"8th Oct. 34th George II. Ordered—That the price of labour with respect to the militia Laws be at the rate of 9d. per day and that no allowance be made to the family of a militia man unless such family reside in the parish from which such militia man be balloted."

the subjects of charge kept or used by you between the 5th day of April 1804 and the 6th day of April 1805."

The following is an account of taxes and cesses paid for the year 1794-5:—

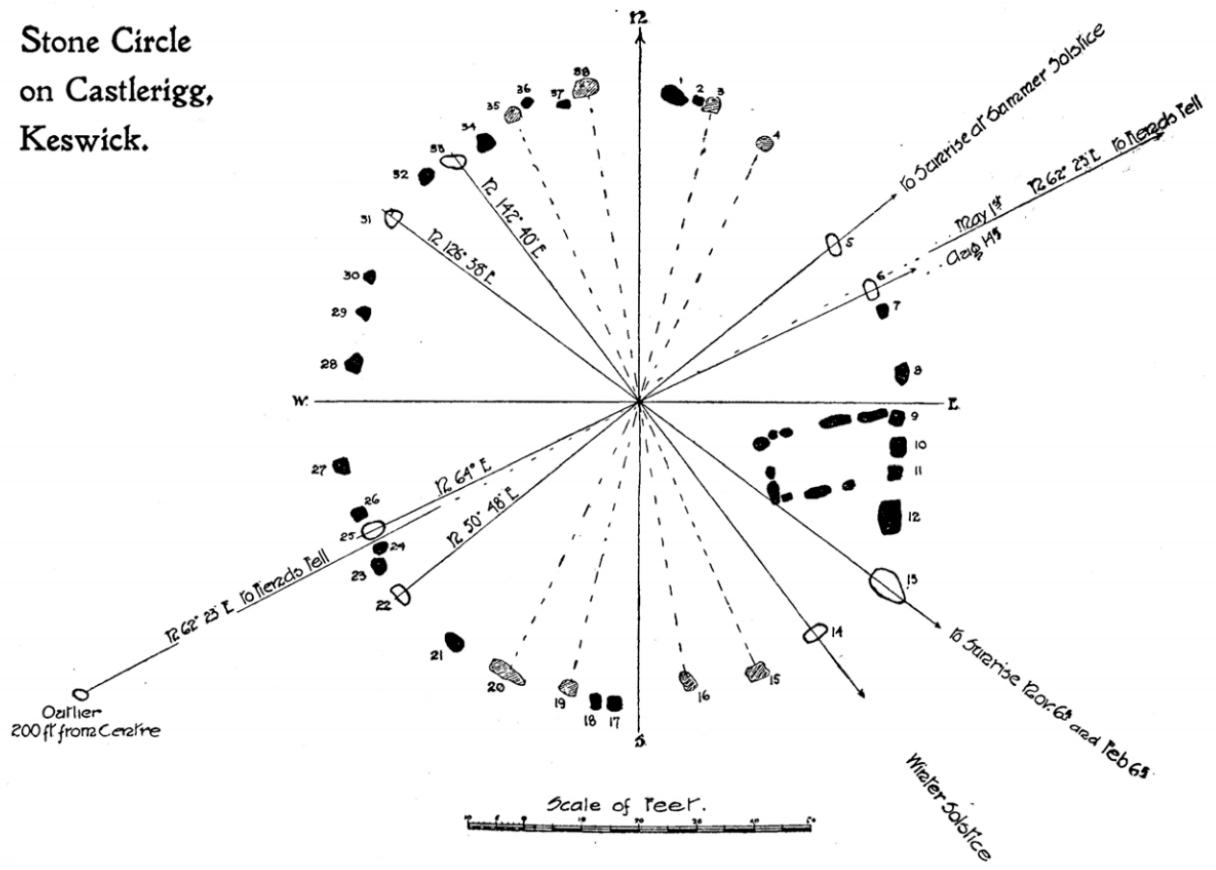
| | | |
|--|--|-----------------------|
| May 31. | Paid to W ^m Chamber poor sess at 6 ^d | |
| | pound | II 6 |
| Paid do five purveys of Church cess.. | | 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ |
| Paid to Rob ^t Glaister 8 purvey County Stock .. | | I 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ |
| Aug. 21. Pd W ^m Chambers poor sess at 6 ^d in the | | |
| pound | II 6 | |
| <hr/> ¹⁷⁹⁵ | | |
| Feb. 19. To Jos. Messenger 4 Purveys County | | |
| Stock | 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ | |
| Feb. 26. Wm Chamber poor sess and hiring a man | | |
| for the Navy | I 3 0 | |
| Jos. Messenger 6 purvey County Stock .. | | I 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ |
| Jos. Wilkinson meal money .. | | I 5 0 |
| Acredale tythe and Communion .. | | I 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ |
| <hr/> | | |
| | | £3 18 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ |

This on a rateable value of £23 comes to 3/5 in the pound apart from tithes on corn and hay, which was at that time collected by the Tithe-farmer in kind.

Another duty cast on the overseer was the taking of the Census. The overseer made out his own books and rendered the account to the proper authority, being paid one halfpenny per head!

H

Stone Circle
on Castlerigg,
Keswick.



Surveyed and Drawn

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By W.D. Anderson, March 1914