

The Bookworm:

Some Recent Acquisitions at the Brian O'Regan Memorial Library

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The Parish Chest : a Study of the Records of Parochial Administration in England; 3d. ed. / W. E. Tate. Chichester SSX : Phillimore, c1983.

Village Records : 3d. ed. / by John West. Chichester SSX : Phillimore, c1997.

Somerset Paupers : Unremembered Lives / Thelma Munckton. Wincanton SOM : Wincanton Pr., c1994.

Through family stories, the Internet, census records, civil registration and parish records, you have traced your family back to your fifth great-grandfather, and have now reached an impasse. What do you do now? Perhaps it is time to enhance your family's story by learning more about the times and the places where your ancestor lived. The Brian O'Regan Memorial Library has recently acquired two useful guides to sources of local history. They are *The Parish Chest*, by W. E. Tate and *Village Records*, by John West.

For many years the parish was the local administrative body and the records were usually kept in a wooden chest in the local church. Now most of these records have been deposited in County Record Offices. Some, but not all, of these records have been filmed by the Mormon Church.

The late W. E. Tate wrote *The Parish Chest* in 1946 to fill the need for a "text book which should indicate the principal classes of record for the use of the parish historian and should give help in interpreting these records". Now in its third edition, this book has become a classic and an essential tool for the local historian or genealogist. In the introduction, Mr. Tate offers a brief history of the English parish and a detailed account of the structure of the parish and its administration. He compares the administration of the modern village with the practices of the past. The next section of the book looks at church records—parish registers (baptisms, marriages, and burials), church wardens accounts and tithes and fees. The third section deals with civil records—vestry minutes, petty constables' accounts, poor law administration, highway maintenance and open field enclosures. There are copious notes, appendices, a bibliography and an index.

Village Records is, perhaps, a more comprehensive guide to English village documents. Author John West offers plenty of "how to do it" advice and illustrates it with numerous examples taken, where possible, from the records of the village of Chaddesley Corbett in Worcestershire. The book is divided into five sections. The first section, "The Approach to Local Documents", is an overview of the field of local history in England and is well worth reading before you venture further into the book. The remaining four sections deal with different eras in English history—Saxon and Early Norman Documents, The Middle Ages, The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, and The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. It is very well indexed and there are numerous bibliographies and lists throughout the book.

Another recent acquisition concerned with documents from the parish chest is *Somerset pauper: unremembered lives*, by Thelma Munckton. From the archives of the Somerset Record Office, the author has made a selection of documents dealing with poor people. Because the language of these documents is repetitive, Ms. Munckton has chosen to present her information in the form of abstracts. She has examined

many sources—apprentice indentures, cases of poaching and larceny from petty session and quarter session records, bastardy papers, account books, and documents of settlement and removal (where you might find a complete history of a family). *Statutes of the Realm (Appendix II)* is a brief overview of the English Poor Laws from 1572 to 1948. A bibliography and an index are included.

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