

East Brent Parish History Group

Meeting 5th September 2012

Meeting Notes

Our first meeting following the 'Summer' break, took place on 5th September with some members away enjoying the late summer sunshine. However, it was good to meet again and talk about the future of the Parish's past. John Rigarlsford gave an extremely interesting talk on "East Brent Poor and the Workhouse" (see later).

Meetings

We agreed that meetings will continue to be held on the first Wednesday each month. There will also be a break in August 2013 as there was this year.

There will be another "Exhibition/Open Day" organised by Betty Griffin & Jenny Binning in 2013. Many people who visited the display during the Parish's Diamond Jubilee celebrations requested that another similar exhibition should take place. The precise date will be announced later but will probably be 1st/2nd June 2013.

Parish Council Website

The new Parish Council Website has been launched and we intend to populate the History Group's portal as soon as possible. This will be a very useful resource and it is certainly looking good.

Presentations at Future Meetings

If anyone can suggest any particular aspects of the Parish's history to be investigated, please let me know. These could be the subject of a presentation at a future meeting.

East Brent Poor and the Workhouse – presented by John Rigarlsford

John's presentation was an excellent demonstration on how well a subject can be researched.

John began with a review of how the poor of '*Ye Brente Marshe*' became even more destitute after the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530's. A poor peasant could be hung for stealing a loaf of bread! This continued until the "Elizabethan Poor Law" was introduced in 1602 as an attempt to stop begging, robbery and murder by desperate people on the streets, It decreed that "Each parish would be responsible for the welfare of its own parishioners" and was paid for by voluntary contributions and rates raised from landowners and tenants.

East Brent parish had a 'Poor House' but its whereabouts are unknown - possibly in Rooksbridge. Some parishes were more sympathetic towards their poor causing paupers to move into those areas from less generous parishes. To prevent this, parliament passed the 1662 Settlement Act - each person had to have a parish of residence or settlement. Paupers without the required papers etc. were returned to the parish of their residence or birth or were even escorted by the overseers to the next parish boundary.

The Parish Workhouse Test Act of 1723 allowed the setting up of parish workhouses where poor relief would be provided. This could be done either by an individual parish or by combining with neighbouring parishes to share the cost. The act introduced the 'workhouse test' - that anyone who applied for relief would have to enter the workhouse where he or she would be obliged to undertake set work in return for relief. The principle was that "Entering the workhouse should be a deterrent to claims on the poor rates. Only the truly desperate would apply to 'The House'".

The Axbridge Poor Law Union came into being in 1836. It was governed by a Board of Guardians, representing the 38 parishes of the Union which included East Brent. A new Axbridge Union workhouse was erected in 1837 off West Street, Axbridge.



Richard Trew, Mayor of Axbridge was appointed Clerk to the Board of Guardians of the Axbridge Union from its beginning until his death in 1874. He had a humanitarian view of the poor and needy and worked tirelessly for their needs.



A list of East Brent Parishioners who were recorded as inmates etc. in the records of the Axbridge Union Workhouse has been transcribed and is available from the East Brent Parish History Group. It should be remembered that in many cases, spending time in the workhouse could be due to many reasons and sometimes beyond the control of those that had fallen on hard times or were seriously ill etc..

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held in the Village Hall on **Wednesday, 3rd October 2012 at 7:00 pm** when there will be a further presentation concerning the history of the Parish of East Brent.

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