

Crime and Punishment

Useful Books

The North Devon Local Studies Centre holds a number of general publications on crime and punishment, including:

- *Crime, Protest, Community and Police in Nineteenth Century Britain*, D Jones (1982)
- *Notes for family historians, Police History Monograph 1*, L Waters (1987)
- *Criminal Ancestors: a guide to historical criminal records in England and Wales*, D T Hawkings (1992)
- *The Rural Constabulary Act 1839 - national legislation and the problems of enforcement*, D Foster (1982)
- *The English village constable, 1580-1642*, J R Kent (1986)
- *A History of Police in England and Wales, 900-1966*, T A Critchley (1967)

Police

From about 1836, each borough in north Devon had its own police force, administered by a Watch Committee. The county police force was established in Devon in 1856.

Great Torrington briefly joined the county organisation, c.1870-1878, withdrew for a period but had returned by the mid-1880s. The North Devon Record Office holds Great Torrington Watch Committee minutes for 1836-1858 only (ref. 2558M/4/8).

South Molton joined the county police force in 1877. No Watch Committee minutes are currently held by the Record Office, though the borough council minutes may have references to the police (ref. 3058add4).

Bideford retained its own borough police force until 1889. There are no separate Watch Committee minutes in the Record Office but the town council minutes contain references to the police force (ref 2379A/C1-4). Rules of the Bideford Police, 1855 and 1884 are also held in the Office (ref. 2379A/Z38/9).

The Barnstaple Borough Police force did not merge with the county force until 1921. There are Watch Committee minutes in the Record Office from 1836 (ref. Barnstaple Castle volumes series).

A number of collections of parish records have material about parish constables, usually their accounts, dating from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. For further details, see the North Devon Record Office subject card index under LOCAL GOVERNMENT: parish constable.

For the county police force, Police Committee minutes from 1859 are available at the Devon Record Office, Great Moor House, Bittern Road, Sowton, Exeter, 01392 384253, which also holds plans of local police stations and lock-ups from 1858 to c.1930 (ref. Devon QS C/C166; Devon QS series B13 and Drafts Files 582-590 and 591A).

See also the North Devon Record Office subject index under CRIME: Police and *Out of the Blue: a history of the Devon Constabulary*, W J Hutchings (1956). The Police Museum at the

headquarters of the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, Middlemoor, Exeter also holds useful information and memorabilia.

Courts

As public records, court records are closed to the public for seventy five years from the date of the latest entry in the volume or document. Most early court records are written in Latin. There are a number of reference books to assist with reading Latin and North Devon Record Office staff can help with the translation of words or short passages.

Assizes dealt with the most serious crimes such as murder and treason. Devon was part of the Western Circuit and records from 1611 are held at The National Archives in London. The Devon Heritage Centre at Exeter holds assize gaol calendars (lists of prisoners awaiting trial) 1784-1919 (ref. Devon QS 32 & 34) and some transportation bonds and contracts 1726-1776 (ref. Devon QS 129).

Quarter Sessions courts dealt with criminal cases and much county administration such as road and bridge repair and the building and maintenance of gaols and houses of correction. The Devon County Quarter Sessions records 1592-1971 are held at the Devon Record Office in Exeter. The Courts of Quarter Sessions were abolished, along with Assizes, in 1971.

Four north Devon boroughs held their own Quarter Sessions, whose records are held in the North Devon Record Office. They deal with a similar mixture of criminal cases and local administrative matters. Surviving records cover the following periods:

- Barnstaple 1328-1971 (ref. B1, Barnstaple Castle (BC), 2654 and 3835)
- Bideford 1659-1952 (ref. 46 and 1064)
- Great Torrington 1686-1836 (ref. 2558)
- South Molton 1671-1733 (ref.1190)

Petty Sessions dealt with minor crimes such as poaching, vagrancy and, later, motoring offences, as well as supervision of parish affairs. From 1828, courts of Quarter Sessions could create Petty Sessional Divisions although, before this, a quorum of justices could meet in informal session to deal with local misdemeanours and administrative business.

Records of all the Petty Sessional Divisions in north Devon are held in the North Devon Record Office, mainly dating from the later nineteenth century (ref. B102). Searchers should note that Braunton Petty Sessional Division included Ilfracombe and surrounding parishes.

Of special interest to those interested in the history of public houses are the registers of alehouse recognisances (bonds for good behaviour taken out by licensees). Those held include Barnstaple 1591 - 1963 (ref. B1, B102); Bideford 1903 - 1963 (ref. B102); Braunton Petty Sessional Division (including Ilfracombe) 1872 - 1962 (ref. B102); Great Torrington 1903 - 1961 (ref. B102) and South Molton 1773 - 1779 (ref. 1190).

A stray item for Cornwall is the minute book of Stratton Petty Sessional Division 1868 - 1876 (ref. 178).

Other civil courts

Juvenile Court records for the north of Devon 1933 - 1970 (ref. B102) are held by the North Devon Record Office. There are also minute or order books for the Courts of Record of Bideford 1695 - 1846 (ref. BBT and 2379) and Great Torrington 1758 - 1810 (ref. 2558). Courts of record were mainly concerned with cases of trespass and damages. A Piepowder Court

book, dealing with the administration of the fair in Great Torrington 1751 - 1814 (ref. 2558), is also available.

Ecclesiastical courts

Records of the court of the Archdeaconry of Barnstaple 1570 - 1857 (ref. 1127) are held in the North Devon Record Office and include cases regarding wills, tithes, defamation of character, immorality and a small number of witchcraft cases. The only surviving deposition book, covering the period 1570 - 1579, has been edited in *Of Chirche-reves and of Testamentes*, P Christie (1994).

The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Exeter exercised wide jurisdiction over cases involving wills, tithes and a range of 'spiritual' matters, including the moral discipline of both clergy and laity. These records from 1508 are kept at the Devon Heritage Centre, Great Moor House, Bittern Road, Sowton, Exeter.

Manor courts

Some records of manor courts are held in the North Devon Record Office. See the North Devon Record Office subject card index under MANORS: court rolls for further details. The court rolls include cases of infringement of manor regulations as well as the enrolment of admissions and surrenders of property by tenants of the manor. Before 1734 the records are usually in Latin. Help with reading words or short extracts from the records is available from North Devon Record Office staff.

Other Sources (non-Record Office material)

Newspapers are a valuable source of crime and court reports. The North Devon Journal from 1824, the Bideford Gazette 1856 - 1982, the Ilfracombe Chronicle 1869, 1876 - 1893, 1911, the Sherborne Mercury 1737 - 1826, 1844 - 1846, 1849 and the Western Morning News from 1975, are available on microfilm in the Local Studies Centre. There is an index of crimes for the North Devon Journal, 1850-1890s, available from counter staff.

The North Devon Athenaeum holds the Police Gazette or Hue and Cry, 1828 - 1829 and 1832 - 1835, listing crimes for which information is sought and lists of deserters from the armed forces.

Prisons

References to gaols and houses of correction will be found in borough minutes and accounts. A single gaol register for Bideford, 1838 - 1852 survives (ref. 1064) and the Report of the Select Committee on Gaols, 1835 has details of the gaols at Barnstaple and Bideford (ref. B1A/C23). All prisons were taken under central government control in 1877.

The diaries of Rev Clifford Rickards, Chaplain of Dartmoor Prison 1877 - 1900 (ref. B69) are held in the Record Office, but they contain few references to individual prisoners.

Other Printed Sources

The North Devon Athenaeum has a selection of books on crime including Cobbett's Complete Collection of State Trials, 1809 - 1811. For transportation, there are several books including *Australia Bound! the story of west country connections 1688-1888*, M Brown (1988) and *The convict Ships 1787-1868*, I Bateson (1974).

There are a number of books on smuggling, including *The Ordnance Survey Guide to Smugglers' Britain*, R Platt (1991) (now out of print, but see the online version at www.smuggling.co.uk), *A Book about Smuggling in the West Country 1700-1850*, A D H Coxe (1984), and *King's Cutters - the revenue service and the war against smuggling*, G Smith (1983). The North Devon Record Office holds the notes and proofs for Stanley Thomas' book about the notorious case of Thomas Benson of Lundy and the sinking of the Nightingale (ref. B117) and a copy of a survey of smuggling in north Devon by Grahame Farr of the National Maritime Museum (ref. H/20/1). Information about other books on law and order in the south west is available from staff.

The North Devon Record Office subject card index has various references to crime, prisons, etc. in addition to the sources mentioned in this guide.

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