

VAGRANCY IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE (1730 - 1834)

PART 2

by Irene Wyatt

Much has been written about vagrancy and about the laws governing vagrants but little about vagrants as people rather than statistics. To find out who the vagrants were and how they came to be vagrants, this study was undertaken.

Gregory King, whose figures are generally regarded as reliable, estimated that in 1688 out of a population of $5\frac{1}{2}$ millions, 2,825,000 received an income less than their expenditure. In other words, at some period in his life, one person in two was dependent on private charity or poor law relief. These were classified by Gregory King as: common seamen, labouring people and out-servants, cottagers and paupers, common soldiers, and vagrants.

The documents which I studied, Vagrants Passes and Duplicate Examinations 1746 - 53 and 1764 - 5 (Q/RV 1 and 2) and Depositions 1766 - 70 (Q/SD) showed that even artisans (of whom there were 240,000 in 1688) could easily become vagrants as a result of unemployment - seasonal or otherwise. Vagrants were not a class apart.

The Passes and Examinations for 1746 - 53 comprised 45 documents referring to vagrants apprehended in the City of Gloucester. 28 of these vagrants were taken up in the Parish of St. Nicholas. 32 were passed to Kingsholm "being the first parish through which they ought to pass in their way to" (their last place of settlement.)

The Passes and Examinations for 1764 - 5 (95 documents) covered a period of six months from October to April and referred to vagrants apprehended in various parts of the county. 32 of these were taken up at Cirencester; 22 at Chipping Campdon.

Four statements by vagrants I found in the Depositions.

An analysis of these documents revealed that the majority of these vagrants were women who, for the most part, were the wives or widows of artisans, soldiers and seafarers. The accompanying charts give the figures.

Soldiers' wives usually travelled with the regiment. A certain quota accompanied their husbands abroad. The rest were apparently left at the port of departure to fend for themselves. Rebekah Sharp, who was born near Exeter and had married there about a year previously, was the wife of "a Private Centinel in the Royal Welsh Fuzileers now lying at Plymouth Barracks." Her husband was probably about to be sent abroad. She was on her way to Flower, in Northamptonshire where she believed her husband had a settlement. When apprehended in Gloucester on January 15th, 1765 she stated that she "hath sold her Cloaths to defray her Travelling Expences and is now quite destitute of Money and hath nothing to Support her." No legal provision appears to have been made for them until 1803 when 43 Geo. III c 61 stated that wives of non-commissioned officers or soldiers, on making proof of not being permitted to embark with their husbands, should receive from the nearest Chief Magistrate a certificate of their place of settlement which would entitle them to ask for relief when on the route and within the time limit set by the magistrate. Widows do not appear to have been included.

Soldiers' widows suffered much hardship. Mary Hawley, a soldier's widow, with her fourteen-month old daughter, was apprehended in Gloucester on April 8th, 1752. She stated that her husband had "lately died at Bristol" and that "being unwilling to beg she with great Difficulty and Fatigue Travelled on Foot from Bristol to this City where being quite destitute of Necessaries and ill of an Ague she was obliged to beg....." She was sent to Carlisle, her place of settlement. This instance is typical of many.

From the nature of their occupations soldiers and seafaring men had difficulty in establishing a place of settlement. They would then inherit their fathers' place of settlement. This created few difficulties if the father had lived a settled life in one place, but the soldier who was himself the son of a soldier might find that his legal place of settlement was a parish in which he had never set foot. Since a woman upon marriage took her husband's place of settlement, wives and widows might find themselves sent to parishes with which they had no real connection and where they were probably most unwelcome. Here are three examples: Katherine Haldane, a soldier's widow was passed from Berwick-on-Tweed to Gloucester where she believed her husband had been apprenticed and established a settlement. The authorities made an enquiry but no evidence of her husband's apprenticeship was found so she and her two children were sent back to Berwick-on-Tweed.

Mary Brandwood, a soldier's wife, who "hath heard and

believes she was Born in Germany, "was apprehended with her fifteen-month old son at Minchinhampton." She stated that she had married in Exeter two and a half years previously and that she believed her husband's settlement was in the parish of Leigh in the County of Lancaster. Although it is more than likely that she had never before been to Leigh nevertheless that is where she was sent.

Anne Hedges, apprehended at Upper Slaughter....." says that she was born in New York, that about five years ago she married with one John Hedges a private man in his Majesty's 22nd Regiment at Albany in North America. That she accompanied her husband to many places abroad in the late war and was wounded at Martinico and was detained in the hospital there as a Nurse 'till the Island was restored on the late peace. That about three months ago she came from West Florida in the Solebay Hospital Ship and landed at Leith in North Britain. That before she left Florida her said Husband was found dead near the Post where he had been placed Centinel. That she has often heard her said husband declare that he was born in the Parish of Ross in the County of Hereford and enlisted as a soldier when he was seventeen years of age....." She was sent to Ross where, obviously, she had never before set foot.

Parish authorities were always anxious to rid themselves of women vagrants, particularly those who were pregnant. Bewildered, unhappy and sometimes ill, they were shunted about from parish to parish. Jane Symmonds, a Trowman's wife, was apprehended in the parish of St. Nicholas. She believed that her husband's settlement was in the parish of Brosely in Shropshire"..... And she further saith that she hath one Child by him named Joseph upwards of Six Years and that she is now Big and Pregnant with Child." Needless to say, she was sent to Brosely.

Scottish women who married Englishmen were, perhaps, more fortunate. The authorities apparently ignored the settlement laws and sent them back to their own country. Margaret Dix, a soldier's widow (one presumes he was English) "..... was taken violently ill and dropt down in the Street as she was going through this City (Gloucester) in her way towards Scotland and hath been confined to her Bed and hath also been relieved in the Workhouse ever since." She stated that she had been born and had worked in Inverness so presumably being sent back there would present no hardship.

The one Irish woman mentioned in these documents, Bridget Loxley, was the widow of a Scottish soldier whose place of settlement she declared she did not know. She had been born in Athlone "in the Kingdom of Ireland." She was sent to Bristol where she was to be put on board any ship going to any port in Ireland.

In some cases the strict letter of the law was observed. Ten year old Elizabeth Walmsley, an orphan, was apprehended in Cirencester in April 1765. The next day her sister and her sister's husband were also apprehended. Elizabeth had evidently been travelling with them for some time. Nevertheless she was taken from them and sent to her place of settlement at Cripplegate, London. Her sister and her husband were sent to his place of settlement in Stamford, Lincolnshire.

Women deserted by their husbands also suffered under the settlement laws. There was no opportunity of "going home to mother." If apprehended as a vagrant the deserted woman was sent back to the husband's place of settlement. Mary Glover lived at Alcester in Warwickshire until she married a Chimney Sweeper whose settlement was at Chadwell in London. They were moved to Chadwell "by an order" shortly afterwards but "her Husband brought her again into the country, turned her adrift and took to another woman." She was apprehended at Chipping Campden on December 12th, 1764 and sent back to Chadwell.

Ill-treatment was often given as the reason for "wandering and asking Charity and behaving in a vagrant-like Manner." Elizabeth Porter, aged 17, bound by Parish Indenture to a Bucklemaker in Wolverhampton two years previously, ran away from her master because of "her Mistress's frequent ill-using of her, and a few Weeks ago beating of her." She was apprehended in Gloucester in December, 1752, and returned to her Master. Three months later she was again found in Gloucester and once more sent back to Wolverhampton. Ann James, aged 19, a Mercer's daughter whose home was in Taunton, Somerset, was found in the churchyard at Upton St. Leonards in a fit and afterwards "supported by the parishioners" for a fortnight, during which time she had several fits. She stated that she had run away six weeks previously after her father had kept her "Locked up and Confined in a Room..... for Three Years and a Quarter..... That in her Confinement her father often Whipt her with a Horse Whip in her Shift and during her whole Confinement she always lay upon Straw." She also declared that her father had kept her locked up because he wanted to prevent her marrying a Naval Lieutenant. She was returned to her father. Richard Sugar, a ten-year old orphan, ran away after a beating. He made his way to Gloucester where, according to his statement, he arrived in December, 1748. He was apprehended in June, 1749, and sent back to the parish he had run away from;

Churchponderbach in Shropshire. These instances are representative of many.

Ex-soldiers could obtain a pass from their officers or the Secretary of War permitting them to beg on their homeward way for a specified time. Mariners and seafaring men could obtain a similar pass from a Justice of the Peace. These passes gave the time and place of discharge or landing, the place to which they were to pass, and set a limit to the time of passage. Despite this a number of ex-soldiers and discharged seamen appear in these documents. Possibly their permits to beg had expired. Perhaps permits had not been obtained in the first place. Whatever the reason some had been "wandering the country" for some time. Among them was John Farrington who had been in the "King's Sea Service" for seven years. When apprehended in December, 1764 at Cirencester, he stated that he was discharged in 1761 and that he had been "wandering from home" for nearly a year seeking work. He had been apprenticed by Indenture nearly fifteen years previously at Farrington in Lancashire and was sent back there.

Whether this parish would welcome him or not is a debatable point. Some parishes, apparently, were having difficulty in supporting the poor they already had. Richard Motley was apprehended at Chipping Campden on November 30th, 1764. His settlement was at Randwick where he had a wife and three children but he had been refused relief there as the "Hamlet was burthened with a number of poor which it is unable to support." However, he was sent back there.

A man could easily find himself classed as a vagrant as a result of financial failure or ill-health. For example George Richards, described as "elderly", had farmed his own estate but had got into debt and taken "to strolling the country." Benjamin Warren, aged 53, who had worked at Flaxdressing in Gloucester for some time said "That having a bad Cold and a very bad Asthma and Shortness of Breath and being unable to work any longer he was obliged to begg and asked for and Received Relief in this City." Thomas Davis "hath been driving Cattle into Kent and by reason of illness he hath been detained Six or Seven Weeks in the Road and is reduced by that means to ask for Charity for a Subsistence."

Two more points of interest are perhaps worth mentioning.

Out of the 140 vagrants who made statements 13 men and 3 women were able to sign their names. They were drawn from a variety of trades. Two vagrants had been married in the Fleet, London. One was a Scotswoman whose husband deserted her at Tewkesbury, and the other was a Pinnaker who had his wife and twelve-day old baby with him.

The accompanying maps show the vagrants' places of settlement. Noting the distances some of them must have travelled, often in severe weather on poor roads, one is led to the conclusion that the private conscience must have been more active than the public conscience. They must have been helped along the way. How else could they have survived?

This statement found in the Depositions seems to bear out this view.

"This examinant being sworn saith that he does not know when he was born but has heard his Mother say that he was born in a pigstye in a village, that he never knew his Father nor where his Father or Mother were born, that his Mother us'd to travel the country with a Lottery and never had any settled place of Residence, that his Mother died about a Month ago at Bladen a Market Town about Six miles from Portsmouth where she had been but three Days before she died of a sore Throat & Fever and was buried the next Day by the Nurse who sold her Lottery and Trinketts & paid for the Funeral & what was due to herself with the money arising therefrom but gave him this examinant nothing.... (He) further saith that his late Mother died at the Sign of the Magpye in Bladen.. & that the next Day he.. apply'd to the Parish Officer of Bladen for relief who advis'd him to go out of the Town into the Country & told him that he could there better get employment amongst the Farmers, that he afterwards went to Wantage Fair & supported himself by the way by standing at People's Doors without begging & that when He was ask'd what he did there he answered that he was in Distress & so was reliev'd, that at Length on the 24th of October last He came to Stow on the Wold..... alone & has been there ever since, that he has been taken in by Susan Fletcher to lodge in her House for nothing ever since Fryday & that before that Thos. Merriner a Farmer of Stow let him lodge on Night Just after the Fair which was on the 24th of October aforesd. in his Tallet & that the Bellman's son let him lodge one night since that in his Tallet & that the Ostler at the White Hart in Stow gave the sd examinant Leeve to lie one Night in the Tallet there for clening the Horses & that he had a supper given Him in the Kitchin at

the White Hart by some Woman either the Mistress or the Maid & that he also lay one Night at the Unicorn at Stow by Leeve of the Ostler there. And also that the Mistress of the Greet Inn gave him money to procure Lodgings & that the Day before Yesterday when he came to Adlestrop to complain to a Magistrate for Want of Relief He had a penny given him by a Servant there, & that Yesterday He had Victuals sent him by a Butcher's wife at Stow to the sd Susan Fletcher's House. And... (he) saith that he does not know that He has any place of Settlement & has no Home but lives by Wandering about & further saith that he is about twelve years of age."

One wonders what became of this boy, James Aires. He must have possessed considerable intelligence and a certain amount of charm or else he was particularly fortunate in his acquaintances. Whichever it was, I believe that many of the vagrants I have mentioned must have received this kind of help along the way. Richard Sugar, the ten-year old boy from Shropshire, had travelled a long way before reaching Gloucester. We do not know how long it took him to make the journey, but we do know that he lived in Gloucester for six months before being apprehended. It is possible that he supported himself by stealing but one imagines that if this had been so, he would not have remained undetected for so long.

It would be naive to suppose that all the vagrants mentioned in these documents were, truly, the victims of cruel circumstance. Possibly there were some who found it "a not unprofitable trade." But, even allowing for this, the fact that most of them were women leads me to believe that the inflexible settlement laws and their rigid application caused much of the hardship which led to vagrancy.

These two studies were made independently but one seems to confirm the findings of the other.

ANALYSIS OF VAGRANTS' PASSES 1746 - 53

	ALONE	WITH CHILDREN	CHILDREN AGED	NO. OF CHILDREN
Married Couples	3	4	12 days to 10 yrs.	9 (5/2/1/1)
Men	10			
Women	12	17	2 mths to 9 yrs.	27
Boys	1			

CLASSIFICATION OF WOMEN VAGRANTS 1746 - 53

	ALONE	WITH CHILDREN	CHILDREN AGED	NO. OF CHILDREN
Soldiers' widows		3	2 mths upwards	4 (1/1/2)
Other widows	2	1		1
Soldiers' wives	3	4	2 yrs to 7 yrs	6 (1/1/1/3)
Ex-soldiers' wives		2	9 mths to 5 yrs	4 (1/3)
Army deserters' wives		1	8 mths	1
Deserted by husbands	1	3	9 mths to 9 yrs	7 (3/2/2)
Others	6	3	2 yrs upwards	4 (1/1/2)

ANALYSIS OF VAGRANTS' PASSES 1764 - 5

	ALONE	WITH CHILDREN	CHILDREN AGED	NO. OF CHILDREN
Married Couples	7	8	6 wks to 18 yrs	13
Men	25	1		1
Women	30	20	2 yrs to 20 yrs	34
Boys	2	(aged 15 yrs and 16 yrs)		
Girls	2	(aged 10 yrs and 14 yrs)		

CLASSIFICATION OF WOMEN VAGRANTS 1764 - 5

	ALONE	WITH CHILDREN	CHILDREN AGED	NO. OF CHILDREN
Soldiers' widows	2	2	8 mths to 10 yrs	3
Sailors' widows		1	2 yrs	1
Other widows	4	13	2 yrs to 20 yrs	23
Soldiers' wives	2	1		3
Deserted by husbands	4	2	3 yrs to 14 yrs	3
Others	18	1	3 yrs	1

VAGRANTS' TRADES OR OCCUPATIONS 1746 - 53

Silk-Weaver's widow	Ex-soldiers (2)
Sail-cloth Weaver's widow	Pin-makers (2)
Ostler's widow	Glover
Soldiers' widows (3)	Seafarer.
Soldiers' wives (6)	Waterman
Ex-soldiers' wives (2)	Whitesmith
Deserter's wife	Flaxdresser
Trowman's wife	Bucklemaker's apprentice
Woolcomber's wife	Metal-Button maker
Lirner's wife	Taylor
Skinner's wife	
Coalminer's wife	Others (10)
Leadminer's wife	
Shoemaker's wife	

1764-5

Chimney Sweep's wife	Ex-soldiers (2)
Mercer's daughter	Ex-marine
Labourers' wives (2)	Ex-seaman (5)
Soldiers' widows (4)	Labourer
Sailor's widow	Cattle drover
Joyner & Carpenter's widow	Fiddler (aged 15)
Soldiers' wives (3)	Farmer
Servants (2)	Hatter
Ex-prisoner	Seller of Books, Ballads, etc.
Widows (16)	Brass Foundor
Singlewoman (7)	Servant
Seller of Laces & Song Books	Gardener
	Bucklenendor & Pedlar.

Others (37)

VAGRANCY IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE (1730 - 1834)

PART I

SOURCES

- Primary: -
1. County Treasurers Accounts (Q/FAC 1-5) and Summary of Q.S. Orders. (Glos. Records Office)
 2. Gloucester Journals. (Gloucester City Library)
- Secondary:
1. English Poor Law History by Sidney and Beatrice Webb.
 2. A History of Vagrants and Vagrancy by C. J. Ribton-Turner (Chapman & Hall, London 1887)
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PART 2

SOURCES

1. Vagrants Passes and Duplicate Examinations 1746 - 53 and 1764 - 5. (Q/RV 1 & 2) (Glos. Records Office)
2. Depositions 1766 (Q/SD 1) (Glos. Records Office)