

INTRODUCTION

Molesley's Dole started in the mid-fifteenth century when Thomas Molesley left his land in Bascote, Warwickshire to trustees. This was so that they could give the money each year on the anniversary of Molesley's death for the benefit of his soul and that of his wife Margaret. Although this religious motive disappeared at the Reformation, Walsall Corporation which had managed to hang on to those lands continued to pay out the dole of one penny per person. How exactly this was done in the early years is not clear, but by the eighteenth century it was paid on the first of January to all inhabitants of Walsall and Rushall parishes. The accounts record the names of the householders and the amount, in shillings and pence, he or she received. The total amount therefore reflects the population and correlates quite well with the actual census figures of 1801, 1811 and 1821. Some over-representation was to be expected as visitors might naturally be passed off as residents. However one advantage of the Dole for later historians is that we can reasonably be certain that, unlike taxes and other official lists, there can have been no motive of evasion. The Mayor and Corporation, who spent nearly one third of their revenues on their own entertainment, had tried to stop the Dole in the eighteenth century but riots had made them think again. The early nineteenth century was made of more insistent reformist zeal and the Charity Commissioners informed the Corporation that they should use the money for a better purpose, the Dole was suspended in 1824. In 1825 the rent from the manor of Bascote, Warks. was used to erect eleven almshouses 'for necessitous widows', one for Rushall, five for the foreign of Walsall and five for the borough. It is interesting to note that the rent paid from the manor of Bascote in connection with 'Molesley's Dole' prior to the erection of the almshouses was £235 5s, almost three times the cost of providing houses for the poor widows!.

The surviving Dole Books, covering the years 1799 to 1823, inclusive, are approximately 7 inches by 5 inches [180mm X 130mm] containing a maximum of 150 pages and are in very good condition.

The entries, showing the head of the household, are neatly written in ink on lined pages with the amount paid shown in the right hand column, page totals are also entered. The original spellings have been copied with no attempt made to correct obvious errors.

In a few books the street names are given, the majority of books simply list the recipient with the amount paid, however by consulting the early directories, several of which are held at Walsall Local History Centre, the records of the 1801, 1811 and 1821 censuses and careful study of the Parish Registers it may be possible for the reader to recognize certain families and

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the locality in which they lived, it is also possible to trace the movement of persons within the area covered in the Dole Books.

Further reading

GLEW, _____	The History of Walsall and its Charities, 1855
PLOT, Robert	The Natural History of Staffordshire, 1686
DUGDALE, Sir William	The History of Warwickshire

Grateful thanks is extended to Mr. C.S. Latimer, Archivist, Walsall Local History Centre for his advice and encouragement and to his staff for their assistance.

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May 1997