



Devon Family History Society
Joint Project Publication with
Devon Record Office



DEVON AND EXETER BOYS' INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL

1873-1888

DRO Reference – Collection 4517

DFHS Book Reference - D008

Voluntary reformatories for young people had been opened by the Philanthropic Society and by private founders in the early 19th century. However juvenile delinquency was viewed with such increasing concern that in the 1840s, a Select Committee of the House of Lords was set up, and this resulted in two Youth Offenders' Acts of 1854. The Act required the Home Office to certify certain recognised institutions, which came to be known as Certified Reformatories and Certified Industrial Schools. Boys and girls aged under 16 who had spent time in gaol could be transferred there. Uncertified Industrial Schools for neglected or destitute children were also opened. These specifically juvenile institutions replaced prison terms for many young offenders, and gave boys and girls a basic education plus a trade. There were also several reformatory ship schools or industrial training ships certified in the late 1850s, although they became shore-based in the 20th century.

The 1857 Industrial Schools Act was aimed at making better provision for the care and education of vagrant, destitute and disorderly children who, it was thought, were in danger of becoming criminals. This Act, and following Acts in 1860-61, enabled magistrates to commit certain young offenders directly to the Industrial Schools, without a prior spell in a gaol or a house of correction. There were 30 Industrial Schools in England by December 1865. The Act also made provision for the children's religious persuasion in the choice of a school. Denominational (non-Church of England) Industrial Schools also existed after 1866, including some for Catholic children, and these were supported by local rates. The Education Act led after 1876 to the founding of industrial day schools and truant schools. By the beginning of the First World War, there were 208 schools for juvenile delinquents, and 132 of these were residential industrial schools. In 1933, the industrial schools which were still in existence became known as Approved Schools.

The Industrial School in Devon was known as the **Devon & Exeter Boys' Industrial School**, and in 1866 its manager was Reverend F. A. Savile, of Barley House, Exeter. The court decided to which Industrial School a child was sent, and in many cases the school chosen was far away from the child's home town or county. Many of the boys sent to Devon and Exeter Boys' Industrial School were from outside the county, including some from Southampton and Winchester in Hampshire, and a reasonable proportion from Maidstone and Gravesend in Kent. A number of the boys also came from Plymouth. Once sentenced, a boy usually had to stay until he had reached 16 years of age. However, the Government did allow suitable boys to join the army or work in the mines at the age of 14.

Devon Record Office holds the surviving records of Devon and Exeter Boys' Industrial School - admission and discharge registers, minute books and superintendents' books - in collection 4517. However, like hospital, prison and mental asylum records, the records of industrial schools are regarded as containing sensitive personal information, and are therefore subject to a 100 year closure period.

The discharge register indexed here includes entries for boys admitted between 1873 and 1888, and was compiled by the superintendent of the school. The original register contains detailed information on the background, reasons for admission and progress of each boy, both before and after his discharge, including details from letters and personal visits, which sometimes continued for some years after the boy left the school. Entries include information added up to as late as 1891. The register should always be consulted if a relevant indexed entry is found, as it almost always includes a great deal of information about the life of each boy.

For more information on the way in which industrial schools operated, you may study the Inspectors' Annual Reports, dating from 1857 onwards, and the Royal Commission of 1884. Both are available in the Public Record Office at Kew, London. Annual Reports can also be found in Parliamentary Papers, which are often available on microfilm in large public and university libraries.