



Devon Family History Society
Joint Project Publication with
Devon Record Office



REGISTER OF PERSONS ADMITTED TO ASYLUMS

1834-1853

DRO Reference – QS118/1

DFHS Book Reference - D035

The Register of persons admitted to Asylums, 1834-1853 (DRO reference: QS/118/1) is found among the Devon County Quarter Sessions records at Devon Record Office. The County Asylums Act of 1828 (9 Geo.IV, c.40) introduced standard records which were to be forwarded by justices of the peace to the Home Department. In 1844 no English County without a County Asylum had as many pauper lunatics as Devon, and this situation was made worse because there were hardly any licensed houses which received pauper lunatics. The 1842 Lunacy Inquiry Act established an Inquiry Commission, which was formed to inquire into, and report on, the treatment of lunacy throughout the whole of England and Wales. The medical and legal commissioners jointly visited and reported on public asylums and licensed houses throughout England and Wales, and in 1844 the commission published a 300 page report, with recommendations for changes in the law. The only licensed lunatic asylums which existed in Devon at that time were as follows:

- ◆ St Thomas's Hospital, Exeter, which was located at Bowhill House. It had been purchased in 1801 for use as an asylum.
- ◆ A licensed Workhouse Asylum at Devonport/Stoke Damerel, holding pauper inmates.
- ◆ Plympton House, Plympton St Mary, which was a Licensed House. It was very expensive and which was severely censored for several reasons in the 1844 report of the Commission. Plympton House had been a private mansion and the house itself was occupied by the proprietor, his family, and a few private patients; the paupers were consigned to buildings which were formerly used as offices, and outhouses. The treatment of patients was atrocious, and included an excessive amount of restraint.

This Register lists persons admitted to the asylums at Devonport and Plympton from 1834 to July 1845. The other asylum mentioned, for which only two patients were listed during the whole period to October 1853, was Ford House.

The name, age, married status, occupation and place of residence of each inmate was recorded where known, as well as the date of admission. For some patients, dates of discharge or death were given. Inmates were mostly from south and west Devon, but there were some from parishes in north Devon and Dartmoor, and a few from out of county and overseas. The Devon County Asylum, Exminster, was built during the years of the Lunacy Enquiry, but was not opened until 1845. From August 1845, all

admissions except one were to the new County Asylum. From this date, only the name and dates of admission and discharge were recorded in this Register. For more information on each of these patients, the records of the Devon County Asylum itself [collection 3769A] which are held at Devon Record Office, may be searched.