



Devon Family History Society
Joint Project Publication with
Devon Record Office



DEVON RECORD OFFICE

WALKHAMPTON SCHOOL REGISTER (GIRLS)

1841-1864

DRO Reference – 2302C/EFA 3A

DFHS Book Reference - D061

This school was founded as a charity school in 1719 by Lady Elizabeth Modyford/Modiford, the widow of merchant and colonial agent Sir James Modyford, who lived at Maristow. Before marriage she had been Elizabeth Slanning. Her husband died in 1673 while she was still in her 30s, and she was a widow for 51 years, before dying in 1724. She is buried in Bickleigh parish church.

The 18th century was an age of philanthropy, when middle and upper-class benefactors like Lady Modyford founded charity schools to instil religious and social discipline in the children of the working classes, and to combat “popery”. The founders did not intend to raise the pupils above their social station, but to fit them for the status in life which God had intended for them. Early teaching in such schools was based on Bible reading and Church of England catechism, sometimes with writing and ‘casting accounts’ (arithmetic).

Lady Modyford first founded a charity school at Buckland Monachorum in 1702, two years after inheriting the Slanning estates. Walkhampton was the most remote of her local properties, and she founded the school there in 1719, arranging for its support through the rentals paid on various of her properties in Buckland Monachorum, Tamerton Foliot, Modbury and Penryn, Cornwall. She gave a cottage in Walkhampton to be used as the school-house; this was probably on the site of the present school building. The school was originally designed to educate 20 poor boys living in Walkhampton parish, who were to be taught by a school-master licensed by the Bishop of Exeter. The pupils were to be chosen by Lady Modyford and later her successors at Maristow, and if there were places to be filled, boys from Sheepstor and Buckland Monachorum parishes were also eligible. The pupils and their master had their own pews in the parish church, and money was provided for Bibles and prayer books, and to make clothes for them to wear to church.

In 1785, the number of boys was increased to 30 and a schoolmistress was appointed for the first time, to teach 10 girls. In 1834 the schoolhouse was repaired and enlarged, and by 1837, there were 40 boys and 20 girls attending. The current bell-tower and school building date from 1895.

This register of applications for admissions to the school is the earliest known original record which now exists. It was begun in 1845 by schoolmaster Edward Courtis Cooper, and is written in a simple exercise book. It records the applications of

parents for their children to be “put on the Foundation” – that is, to be granted free education at Lady Modyford’s School. Besides giving names and ages of children, parents’ names and addresses, numbers of children in the family and date of actual admission (if any), it also gives the father’s occupation. Children were obviously drawn by this time from other parishes like Sampford Spiney and from the village of Horrabridge. A number of these children later emigrated with their families, mainly to the United States. The first log book commenced in 1869, and collection 2302C at the Devon Record Office also contains this document, as well as other log books, admission registers, attendance registers, summary registers, evacuees register, timetables and other papers. These include a printed history of the school, which celebrated its 250th anniversary in 1969, and is still known as Lady Modiford’s Primary School.