



Devon Family History Society
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Devon Record Office



DEVON RECORD OFFICE

HOMES FOR FRIENDLESS AND FALLEN GIRLS, EXETER - REGISTER

1879-1881

DRO Reference – 74/15/1

DFHS Book Reference - D077

These homes were founded by a Church of England organisation - the Exeter Diocesan Association for the Care of Girls. The broad aim of this Association, founded in 1879, was to help 'friendless' girls and women 'in moral danger', and those already involved in 'an immoral way of life'. This included 'fallen' girls and women who had become pregnant. Women and girls came to the Exeter Diocesan Association's homes from their own homes, from the streets, from prison or the workhouse, or were sent there by a magistrate. Most were aged between 18 and 40, though younger girls were also admitted, particularly to the Preventive Home. They were taught to wash, mend and sew and attended Bible classes.

The Association headquarters and Preventive Home was first located at a house at 20 Holloway Street, Exeter. It accommodated girls between 13 and 16 years of age, who had not already 'lost their character'. They were taught domestic duties and sewing, and were helped to find work. Those who wished to sponsor the care of a particular girl would pay 5 shillings a week. The Rescue Home for the 'fallen' girls and women was at a separate location. It was originally based in rooms at Mrs Rounsefell's house, first at 14 Friars Walk and later at 11 Friars Walk, Exeter. From 1903, the Rescue Home moved to a building which was already named St Olave's Home, at 32 Bartholomew Street East. It had been a girls' home, but was now used as the Exeter Diocesan Association's rescue or refuge home to receive "fallen girls" of different categories. Expectant mothers were cared for at St Olave's Home until about 4 weeks before their confinement and then went elsewhere, presumably to the workhouse, to give birth.

Most of the girls and women went out from there to private homes as domestic servants, but many did not stay at their jobs very long. Others moved into another institution. After a short stay at St Olave's Home, girls were sometimes sent on to a House of Mercy as "penitents". Others were sent to the Exeter penitentiary, the hospital or the Industrial School for Girls, which was also in Bartholomew Street. Some were admitted to the Rescue Home more than once. Their babies were boarded out with foster parents. The mothers contributed to the support of their babies, but fathers gave only a tiny amount. Few girls were willing to apply for affiliation orders through the Courts, though the Association was willing to cover their legal costs.

Dr. E. D. Irvine of Exeter, who worked for the Exeter Diocesan Association, wrote an article about the Association and their homes, titled *A Century of Voluntary Service: The Exeter Diocesan Association for the Care of Girls (St. Olave's Trust)*. It was published in Transactions of the Devonshire Association, Volume 113, 1981, pages 133-145. Some surviving records of the homes were deposited in Devon Record Office between 1974 and 1980 by Dr. Irvine [DRO reference: 74/15]. These include admission registers, covering the dates 31st December 1879 to March 1923. Those dating to 1905 [DRO refs: 74/15/1 to 74/15/3B] are currently available for public access.

The first admission register indexed [74/15/1] is the earliest one which survives. It is labelled 'Entry Book. L.A. Friendless Girls. 1880', and contains entries for 316 girls, the last admission being in November 1882.

The admission register indexed [74/15/2] covers dates of entry from 6th October, 1882 to 26th August 1887. It is labelled 'Entry Book. L.A. House of Rest. 1883'.