



Devon Family History Society
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HONITON SCHOOLS SCHEDULES

1879

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Until the late 19th century, primary education for poor children was provided by schools run either by the National Society, originally called 'The National Society for the Promotion of the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church' or by 'The British and Foreign Schools Society'. The aim of the National Society was to have a church school in every parish which would teach children the doctrine and prayers of the Anglican Church and give them a basic education. The founder of the National Society was the Rev. Andrew Bell, who began a system which he called 'mutual instruction'. This meant that he taught a subject to one of the brighter children, and that child then passed the information on to others. This idea was developed by a Quaker, Joseph Lancaster, who became the founder of The British and Foreign Schools Society. His monitorial system enabled a large number of children to be taught together, by using the older children, called monitors, to teach the younger ones in small groups.

In 1861, a Royal Commission was held to investigate the state of education in elementary schools, and it was reported that there were not enough school places for all the children who needed one, that the standard of teaching was low and that attendance, particularly in rural areas, was poor. One result of this report was that the amount of the grant paid to each school by the government, was to be decided by the attendance rates for the school and by the number of children who passed examinations in reading, writing and arithmetic.

The Elementary Education Act, passed in 1876, required parents to ensure that their children received a basic education and also set up school attendance committees to compel attendance at school in districts where there was no school board.

These schedules are abstracts of the examination schedules completed by the head teachers of the schools in Honiton in March 1879. The forms cover pupils at the British School and the National School. The National School was the parish school, run by the Church of England and had an infants, boys and girls departments. The British School was linked to the British and Foreign Schools Society and run by the non-conformists in Honiton. It had closed in the 1870s, but reopened in 1878, just before these schedules were written.

The schedules list each child's name, whether or not he or she had passed the examinations, the number of his or her attendances in the last year, the child's age

on his or her last birthday, the date of his or her admission to the school and the standard, or class, in which the child had been examined. There is also a column for residence, but this had to be filled in only if the child lived outside the borough of Honiton. There are no records at all of pupils at the British School and admission registers for pupils at the National School survive only from 1896, so these schedules are the only evidence we have of the names and ages of school children in Honiton at this date. In theory, they should include the name of every child of school age living in Honiton, and so are an invaluable resource for family historians.