



Devon Family History Society
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BRIXHAM VACCINATOR REGISTER

1885

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The Vaccination Act of 1840 stipulated that free vaccination against smallpox should be available as a charge on the poor rates. However, it was not until the Vaccination Act of 1853 that vaccination was made compulsory and it became the responsibility of the poor law guardians to make sure that all infants in good health were vaccinated within four months of birth. However, the guardians were not given any powers of enforcement and had no means of ensuring that all children were vaccinated. In 1867, they were given the right to prosecute parents for non-compliance; parents could be fined and even sent to prison if the fines were not paid. Guardians were required to keep registers of vaccinations.

The Poor Law Board's General Order of February 1868 set out a form to be used by the Guardians to draw up a contract of vaccination with local doctors. Under the terms of the contract, the Poor Law Union had to provide a register in which the vaccinator was obliged to record all the vaccinations he had carried out; he was only to be paid for the cases written in the book. The register had to be submitted for inspection every month.

Small pox vaccine was given by scoring, or scarifying, the child's arm with a lancet and rubbing viral material into the wound. In the official register, the vaccinator had to record a case number, the date of vaccination, the name and age of the person vaccinated, their place of residence and the source of the vaccine. N.V.E. meant that the vaccine had come from the National Vaccine Establishment, but the vaccinator had to inspect each person vaccinated about two weeks later to see if the blisters, called vesicles, had appeared, indicating that the vaccine had taken; this gave him the opportunity to take fluid from the vesicles which could be used, in turn, to vaccinate the next patients. In the register, this is indicated, not by N.V.E., but by the case number of the person from whom the fluid was taken. However, in the late 1890s, glycerinated calf's lymph was developed and following the Vaccination Act of 1898, all vaccine used had to be lymph issued by the Local Government Board, the national body responsible for public health matters which had replaced the Poor Law Board. The vaccinator still had to note the source of the vaccine; if it came from the National Vaccine Establishment, he had to write N.V.E. and the reference number for that batch of vaccine. Not all those vaccinated were babies; some were older children and adults who had not been vaccinated in infancy or who needed to be re-vaccinated for some reason.