



Devon Family History Society
Joint Project Publication with
Devon Record Office



DEVON RECORD OFFICE

TAVISTOCK WORKHOUSE – RELIGIOUS CREED REGISTER

1874-1875

DRO Reference – PLU75

DFHS Book Reference – D173

The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act proposed that all 15,000 parishes in England and Wales form into Poor Law Unions, each with its own workhouse and supervised by a local Board of Guardians. In the late 1830s, hundreds of new workhouse buildings were erected across the country. The buildings were designed to provide segregated accommodation for the different categories of pauper — male and female, able-bodied and infirm, and children.

Tavistock Poor Law Union was formed on 8th October 1836, and the workhouse was built in 1837 at a site in Bannawell Street, Tavistock. It was originally intended to accommodate 300 inmates, who came from 24 parishes in the area surrounding the town of Tavistock: the parishes of Bere Ferrers, Bradstone, Brentor, Buckland Monachorum, Coryton, Dunterton, Kelly, Lamerton, Lifton, Lydford (including Dartmoor), Marystow, Mary Tavy, Meavy, Milton Abbot, Peter Tavy, Sampford Spiney, Sheepstor, Sydenham Damarel, Stowford, Tavistock, Thrushelton, Lewtrenchard, Walkhampton and Whitchurch. At a later date Calstock and Tavistock Hamlets were added.

People ended up in the workhouse because they were too poor, old, ill or infirm to support themselves, or had no-one to care for them when they became elderly. Before public mental asylums were established in the mid-nineteenth century (and sometimes even after that), poor persons who were mentally ill and mentally handicapped were often sent to be cared for in the workhouse. Many inmates were long-term residents of the workhouse. Pregnant women who were ill, infirm, very poor, unmarried or deserted by their husbands, and who became dependent on poor relief, were also forced into the workhouse to give birth.

From 1868-9, the workhouse master had to record the religious creed of each new inmate so that appropriate arrangements could be made in respect of their education (in the case of children), serious illness, or death. The register in which this information was recorded, usually listed the name of the inmate, date of admission, the place from whence each was admitted, the religious creed or faith (e.g. Church of England, Wesleyan Methodist), the name of the informant and date of discharge or death. Nineteenth century workhouse admission and discharge registers have usually not survived in Devon, and this is the case for Tavistock Workhouse; however, the

creed register can act as a replacement for these lost registers, and is therefore a valuable, and for Devon, a rare survival.

This religious creed register of inmates admitted to Tavistock Union Workhouse [ref: DRO Tavistock PLU 75] is held at the Devon Record Office in Exeter. It covers the dates from 1868 to 1875.

Registers of Tavistock Workhouse births, 1866-1918 (Tavistock PLU 21), and deaths, 1866-1919 (Tavistock PLU 23) also survive, and records over 100 years old in these registers are open to public access and were indexed by Devon Family History Society in 2001. Because Poor Law Union inmates' records are closed for 100 years from the date of creation, the indexes currently only include entries up to the end of 1901.