



Devon Family History Society
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Devon Record Office



DEVON RECORD OFFICE

WEST OF ENGLAND SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF – ADMISSIONS REGISTER

1827-1836

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The West of England School was founded in 1826 to educate deaf children from poor families. In April of that year, advertisements were put in the newspapers asking for donations and subscriptions. Those donating £20 or more or subscribing £2 annually or more, became members of the General Committee, and those donating £10 or more or subscribing £1 annually or more, became Governors, of whom eight were elected annually on to the Committee. The clergy were asked to report on any deaf children in their parishes who would benefit from being sent to the school. It was difficult to win support for the school at first, because the prevalent view was that deaf and dumb children could not be educated, but once the school opened, in 1827, anyone was welcome to visit at 12 o'clock each day to see the children at their lessons. Watching the pupils at work convinced visitors that the school was efficient and also encouraged them to put money in the school's donation box.

The school started in a leasehold house in Alphington Road, Exeter, and within a few months, had twenty six children, of which four were private pupils whose parents were able to pay for their education. However, in October 1827, three acres of land near Topsham Road were bought and the new, larger, school building was opened the following year. The rules stated that it was to be a school of industry as well as education, so the children were taught various crafts and domestic skills to enable them to earn a living. Most of the boys were found apprenticeships when they left the school, while some of the girls went into domestic service, some became apprentices and some returned home to help their mothers. The head master of the school from 1827 to 1834, was Mr Bingham. He had junior masters working under him, and one of these, Mr William Gordon, took over from him when he left. Mr Gordon started to teach some of the children to speak and this became normal practice, especially for children who had residual hearing.

Children were admitted to the school from the age of seven, but no older than twelve. They could remain at the school until they were fifteen. Any child wishing to be accepted at the school had to produce a baptism certificate, a certificate from a doctor to say that they were deaf and had no disabilities or infectious diseases, a certificate from the minister of the parish describing the family's circumstances, a certificate from the parish officers that they would provide the child with clothes and pay towards his or her maintenance, and a recommendation from at least three of the Governors of the school.

This register of applications for admission to the school covers the period 1827 to 1836. There are columns for the child's name, his or her date of birth or baptism, the date of the application, the parents' names and address and the name of the person who recommended the child for admission. There is no note in the register to state whether or not the child was accepted as a pupil, but lists of charity pupils were printed every year in the annual reports, so it is possible to trace a child's progress through the school through these.