

DUNCHIDEOCK SCHOOL 1830-1870

In 1830, Dunchideock was a small, hilly, rural parish of about 950 acres, 4 miles south-west of Exeter on the edge of the Haldon Hills. It was reached by steep narrow lanes, and had no nucleated village; the church stood close to the Barton farmhouse and courtyard, and several cottages, but the other cottages and farms were scattered across the parish. Since 1791, it had been amalgamated with the neighbouring parish of Shillingford St. George, and the Rector of both parishes lived in the rectory house in Shillingford St. George.

In 1831, according to the results of the Church School Enquiry held among the records of the National Society, Dunchideock parish, with a population of about 200 living on farms and in scattered cottages, had one day and Sunday school attended by 25 pupils – 13 boys and 12 girls - which was claimed to have adopted the National Society system of education, and used schoolbooks published by the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK).¹ It had been founded as a charity school by Lady Dorothy Elizabeth Palk (commonly known as Lady Elizabeth Palk), the widow of Sir Lawrence Palk, and was held in a cottage in Dunchideock which was owned by the Palks. It was still the only school in the parish in 1870.

The Palk family seat, purchased by Lady Elizabeth's father-in-law Robert Palk in 1770, was *Haldon House*, located in the neighbouring parish of Kenn, very close to the boundary of Dunchideock parish. From the time that Robert purchased this house and its adjoining lands, until the end of his life, he extended the house and gradually increased his land-holdings in the neighbourhood "*with the view of obtaining a large continuous district near Haldon [rather] than as a lucrative investment*".² In 1780, Robert Palk had thus begun to purchase land in the parish of Dunchideock. In that parish, the Pitmans of *Dunchideock House* (a large two-storey mansion which was actually an extended farmhouse) were the squires, and owned much of the land in Dunchideock, but Sir Robert Palk (who had been created a Baronet in 1782) was Lord of the Manor and patron, and his nephew the Reverend Robert Palk Welland was appointed as Rector. The Palks always used Dunchideock (and not Kenn) as their parish church when they were in residence in the country, and were buried in a family vault inside the church.

In 1830, Lady Elizabeth Palk's son Sir Lawrence Vaughan Palk was in charge of the estate. Between them, the two landowners – Palk and Pitman – had gradually bought up all of the land in Dunchideock which had been owned by smallholders. In 1819, the two owners had decided to exchange some of their Dunchideock lands and in early 1822, after some troublesome delays, the conveyances had been finalised. Major Pitman had gained the old rectory house³ and the former glebe land, and 5 small tenements with gardens and orchards, occupied by labourers. Sir Lawrence Palk had bought the schoolhouse, and thereafter had become its patron.⁴ This probably establishes the date at which it became a charity school

¹ NS/7/7/1/1. Register: Church School Enquiry Vol. 1, page 191 (Church of England Record Centre/CERC).

² C. E. Pitman, *History and pedigree of the family of Pitman of Dunchideock*, Mitchell, Hughes and Company, London, 1920, p. 123; Percy Russell, *A History of Torquay*, Torquay Natural History Society, Torquay, 1960, page 68.

³ Also commonly known as the Priests' House, opposite the church and later divided into several cottages. Later named Parsonage Cottages and in the 20th century, named Barton Cottages.

⁴ 58/9/Box 107/5 ; 58/9/Box 122/17-21 (Draft Conveyances and Bonds for quiet enjoyment, 1819, executed 1822); Dunchideock Tithe Map and Apportionment, 1842-1843; Land Tax Assessment, Dunchideock, 1822-1823 (Devon Heritage Centre/DHC).

owned by the Palks. There had been no educational charity funds in existence in the parish when the school was opened.⁵

In 1829, the Dunchideock Poor Rate recorded the two occupants of the schoolhouse – they were named Lugg and Hole (the latter being a shepherd), and were paying 2¼ d poor rate altogether.⁶ It is possible that the other occupant, by the name of Lugg, was a schoolteacher, but there is no other evidence to confirm this. Later census records suggest that the cottage was probably always in shared occupancy, with the schoolhouse at the northerly end of the building, and a smaller cottage attached to the other end.

The schoolhouse cottage still exists, and sits opposite the entrance to the road from Dunchideock to *Haldon House*. It is a listed building which was said to be 400 years old in 1989,⁷ but the building does not appear on an estate map of 1659, which includes the field on which the house was built, and other buildings on the Dunchideock Barton estate,⁸ so it must not have been built until later. It is likely that any cottage which stood there was also rebuilt to some extent, as the schoolroom was originally a high-ceilinged room which rose to the roof,⁹ and in 1870, churchwarden Thomas Strong described the school as ‘...*many years since built by Lady Elizabeth Palk...*’¹⁰

A parish history of Dunchideock has not been written; neither has there been a detailed study of either of the schools which existed in Dunchideock. Robert Bovett’s *Historical Notes of Devon Schools* gives a small amount of information about the charity school, and its successor.¹¹ Memories of Dunchideock, an article written by Archie Winkworth, one of the 20th century owners of Dunchideock House, and published online on the Genuki Devon website, includes a short history of the village schools, based mainly on local oral information.¹² No pupil records of the charity school have survived, though a printed bound copy of the school rules was apparently found at auction in Tavistock in about the 1980s, and placed by the purchaser in a glass-fronted case in the village hall. It recorded that there was a weekly charge for attendance, and rules on dress, cleanliness and behaviour. Two samplers done by children while at the school were also found, and were hanging in the village hall in the 1980s.¹³

In 1833, the Exeter Diocesan Replies to Queries, completed by the Rector of Dunchideock with Shillingford St. George, prior to the visitation by the new Bishop of Exeter, recorded that the parish had “*a private school of Sir Lawrence Palk ...Educates 20.*”¹⁴

The school at Dunchideock does not seem to be listed in the Church School enquiry of 1837,¹⁵ but it still existed, and is listed in the census of June 1841, as well as appearing on the tithe apportionment of 1842 and tithe map of 1843.

⁵ CHAR2/57 (The National Archives/TNA).

⁶ Dunchideock parish, account book and vestry minutes, 1814-1973, 1213A/1/PO/3 (DHC).

⁷ Robert Bovett, *Historical Notes on Devon Schools*, Devon County Council, 1989, page 95.

⁸ 1926 B/P/E/2/1. Pitman family papers in Anstey and Thompson solicitors’ collection (DHC).

⁹ A.N. Winckworth, *Memories of Dunchideock*, at <http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/DEV/Dunchideock/Memories>

¹⁰ ED21/3537 (The National Archives/TNA).

¹¹ Robert Bovett, *Historical Notes on Devon Schools*, page 95.

¹² A.N. Winckworth, *Memories of Dunchideock*.

¹³ A.N. Winckworth, *Memories of Dunchideock*.

¹⁴ Chanter 367: Diocese of Exeter Visitation Records, 1833 - Dunchideock with Shillingford St George (DHC).

¹⁵ NS/7/7/2/1 Register: Church School Enquiry Vol. 1, 1837. (CERC). Although Dunchideock was apparently not included in the 1837 Church School enquiry records held in the National Society collection at the Church of

The earliest schoolmistress to be securely identified was Mrs. Dey, and it is possible to discover a little about her background. In June 1841 when the census was taken, Melloney Dey, the '45' year old schoolmistress, was living at the schoolhouse with her two children, '20' year old gardener John Dey and '15' year old Amelia Dey. In the adjoining cottage lived Amos Hole, a young shepherd, with his mother, wife and two small children.¹⁶ He was probably the son of the shepherd who had lived there in 1829.

Mellony Dey (also spelt as Day) had been a shoemaker's wife, and was actually closer to 54 years of age when the census was taken.¹⁷ As Mellony Goldsworthy she had married shoemaker John Dey in Exeter St Sidwell parish in 1816, and in 1817, while they were living in the parish of Ide, which bounded Dunchideock to the north, their son John Tucker Dey/Day had been born.¹⁸ By 1841 she was widowed. In 1842, 'Melony' Dey and William Skinner were listed on the Dunchideock tithe apportionment as occupants of the 'schoolhouse &c', as well as a long strip of orchard land adjoining the schoolhouse, a strip of garden at the side of the road heading for Haldon House, and another orchard plot away from the house.¹⁹

There was another schoolmistress living in Dunchideock at the same time as Mellony Dey; she was named Martha Crispin, and was a middle-aged spinster, born in Dunchideock in 1793,²⁰ and living in a cottage elsewhere in the parish in 1841 with a 14 year old niece.²¹ Martha's family, who had been tenants of the Palk family, had lived for a couple of generations in Dunchideock as agricultural labourers and blacksmiths. Nothing is known of any other school in the parish, so perhaps Martha ran a small dame school in her cottage.

The next Return of the General Enquiry made by the National Society into the State of Schools, in 1846-1847, gave combined results for the parishes of Dunchideock and Shillingford St. George. The combined population of Shillingford and Dunchideock was recorded as 250, with only 28 children attending school in the 2 parishes. The charity school in Dunchideock was described as a Sunday and day school educating 8 boys and 12 girls.²² Without pupil records, it is not clear who these pupils were, nor what their social status was, but directories, censuses and parish records show that the population of Dunchideock was largely composed of a number of farmers, a farm bailiff, farm labourers and tradesmen – the parish had its own blacksmith, tailor, wheelwright and shoemaker. The schoolhouse was very close to the parish boundary of Kenn and in walking distance of outlying parts of Exminster, and farms in Ide parish. The only resident landowning family in Dunchideock was that of Major Pitman, with *Haldon House* the only other substantial house nearby in Kenn. It is not clear whether the local farmers' children attended the charity school, and because parents had to pay, it is likely that the poorest farm labourers' children could not afford to attend. In addition, relations between the two landowners deteriorated during the 19th century, resulting in friction between

England Record Centre, I did not look at the original records myself, but relied on a tabular summary of results by another researcher.

¹⁶ 1841 census, Devon, Dunchideock parish. Note that ages above 15 years given in this census were meant to be rounded down to the nearest 5 years,

¹⁷ See age at burial, in Exeter St Thomas Register of burials, 1850-1869, 4781A/PR/1/56 (DHC) .

¹⁸ Transcript of Exeter St Sidwell parish register of marriages, online on Find My Past; Ide register of baptisms, 1813-1843, 1857A/PR/1/4 (DHC).

¹⁹ Dunchideock tithe apportionment, 1842.

²⁰ Dunchideock parish register of baptisms, 1213A/PR/1/2 (DHC).

²¹ 1841 census, Devon, Dunchideock parish.

²² NS/7/7/3/1 Return of the General Enquiry made by the National Society into the State of Schools, 1846-1847 (CERC).

them and affecting the activities of tenants in the parish, so it is possible that it was mainly the Palk family's tenants who sent their children to the school.

No details of the schoolmistress were given in the 1846-1847 enquiry, but by 1849, Mellony Dey, had been replaced by Isabella Long. *White's Directory of Devonshire*, published in 1850 but most probably compiled late the previous year, listed Isabella as schoolmistress, and described the charity school as 'a small school, supported chiefly by the Rector.' By this time the Reverend Henry Palk, a younger son of Sir Lawrence Vaughan Palk, held this position.²³ Dunchideock's parish church was the only place of worship in the parish, and the Palk family were members of the established church, but the school was not described as a church school.

Elderly widow Mellony Day, whose two children had married and left their home in Dunchideock in 1841 and 1842,²⁴ was still apparently teaching – in 1851 she was described as a schoolmistress, lodging with a labourers' family in Christow, a parish on Dartmoor, some miles south-west of Dunchideock.²⁵

Isabella Long was a young Irish-born widow who moved from London in about 1849 with her own 2 young children, to teach at the school. Her older daughter Charlotte had been born in Ireland in about 1845, and the younger, Eliza Ann, had been born and baptised in west London in 1847. Isabella's husband William, who had been a compositor, had died before Eliza Ann's baptism in London in May 1847.²⁶ In early 1851 when the census was taken, 30 year old Isabella and her two daughters were sharing the school accommodation with a live-in servant girl and 2 motherless boarders – Mary and Ellen Tripe, who were from Alphington.²⁷ Their father was a baker who had been widowed in 1850, and the girls may have been able to board at the school in Dunchideock because their uncle Edward Ford was Sir Lawrence Palk's farm bailiff. Their uncle Edward and his wife Charlotte [who was the sister of their dead mother] lived very close by to the school, at *Webborton Cottage*.²⁸ William Skinner, an agricultural labourer, was still living with his wife and two children in the cottage adjoining the school.²⁹

In 1851, schoolmistress Martha Crispin, by now aged 57, was still living in a cottage in the parish, apparently not far from the school, with her 24 year old niece, who was a dressmaker.³⁰

The school, being the property of the Palks, was apparently used for other parish and estate activities as well – in December 1848, the *Western Times* newspaper had advertised an auction of trees, wooden poles and ricks of wood in the Webborton plantations near *Webborton Cottage* and *Haldon House*, to be held at the schoolhouse on a Saturday, and in the following year a similar auction had been advertised, to be held in the schoolroom on a Monday in July.³¹

²³ *White's Directory of Devonshire*, 1850

²⁴ Exeter St Mary Steps marriage register 4768A/PR/1/12, 1841 (Amelia Sophia Dey), and Kenn parish marriage register 2668A/PR/1/12, 1842 (John Day) (DHC).

²⁵ 1851 census, Devon, Christow parish. By 1861 she had retired and when the census was taken, was described as an annuitant, visiting another elderly widow in Lymptone, Devon. She was eventually buried at the age of 77 in Exeter, St. Thomas the Apostle churchyard, in early 1864.

²⁶ St. Dunstan in the West parish, register of baptisms, 1847, digitised online, on Ancestry.com.

²⁷ 1851 census, Devon, Dunchideock parish.

²⁸ Information on Edward Ford's employment as the Palk bailiff are found in the Palk family papers in the Kennaway collection [58/9] in Devon Heritage Centre.

²⁹ 1851 census, Devon, Dunchideock parish.

³⁰ 1851 census, Devon, Dunchideock parish.

³¹ *Western Times*, Saturday December 16, 1848, Saturday July 7, 1849, digitised on British Newspaper Archive.

The management of such events fell to Edward Ford and other estate employees in the 1840s; in about 1840, Sir Lawrence Vaughan Palk and his wife and their youngest children moved to France to escape increasing financial problems. They spent some years there; Lady Palk died in Dieppe, France in 1846, and Sir Lawrence stayed on, accumulating debt. He married again a couple of years later, to a young Frenchwoman, much against the wishes of his children. There was ample evidence by 1848 of feuding within the Palk family, with litigation over family property, their father Sir Lawrence spending all of his time in France estranged from his children, and a mounting burden of debt. Their lifestyle continued to be ostentatious, and the family, led by the oldest son Lawrence Palk and his wife, still kept a large establishment at *Haldon House*, even while their father was absent, but the family properties, including those at Dunchideock were heavily mortgaged and there were signs that costs of repairs and maintenance were mounting.³² Presumably, the upkeep and support of the school was a relatively inexpensive part of this.

After the death of Sir Lawrence Vaughan Palk's French wife, there seems to have been some sort of gradual reconciliation, and after negotiations with his son Lawrence, he was finally able to return to Haldon. In July 1857, cottagers and labourers from the Haldon estate sat down to dinner at the schoolhouse, in celebration of the return of Sir Lawrence Vaughan Palk to *Haldon House*. After the dinner, Sir Lawrence and a few friends visited the school to drink the health of the local workers. The children belonging to the school were invited to *Haldon House* for their own treat on the following Saturday.³³

Billing's Directory of Devonshire, published in 1857, described the school as now being conducted on the Home and Colonial System, and supported by Lady Palk and the children's payments. The Home and Colonial School Society was an Anglican institution, founded in 1836 'for the Improvement and Extension of the Infant School System at Home and Abroad, and for the Education of Teachers'. The founders had been educationalists who were advocates of the Pestalozzi method of teaching, which combined formal teacher training with the education of pupils. Pestalozzi was a Swiss educational reformer, who advocated education of the poor and was concerned with infant education at a time when this was not seen as important. The society was against the use of catechisms, and rote-learning of all kinds, and taught infants by a method involving sounds. The first Home and Colonial Society schools had been established at Gray's Inn Road, London in 1838, where teachers were trained and children were taught.³⁴ Isabella Long must have been an advocate of this educational system, and may even have been trained at the schools in London.

In 1861 when the census was taken, schoolmistress Isabella Long and her 13 year old daughter Eliza Ann – by this time a pupil teacher – were still living at the schoolhouse. William Skinner, a 47 year old agricultural labourer, was still living in the adjoining cottage – named by this time as the Post Office – with his wife.³⁵ Isabella's older daughter Charlotte was an apprentice, living at *Vane Hill House* in Torquay with dressmakers, milliners and other

³² 58/9/Box 109/11 (Deposit of title deeds in bank, 1829); 58/9/Box 105/22-3 (Corresp., 1849-50); 58/9/Box 112/Folder 1 (Palk loan, 1841); 58/9/Box 159/8 (Corresp., 1857, 1860); 58/9/ Box 122/40a-d (Corresp., c.1854) (DHC).

³³ *Western Times*, 4 July, 1857, digitised on British Newspaper Archive.

³⁴ UCL Bloomsbury Project website: page on Home and Colonial School Society at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/institutions/home_and_colonial.htm

³⁵ The building opposite the church which had been the old rectory house – the priest's house – divided later into several cottages. Five years later, in 1866, Martha Crispin died and was buried in Dunchideock churchyard.

apprentices.³⁶ By this time, Martha Crispin, aged 67 and still described as a schoolmistress, had moved to *Parsonage Cottages*, near the church.³⁷ Sir Lawrence Vaughan Palk had died the year before, and his son Sir Lawrence, a Member of Parliament, and wife Maria Harriet were now patrons of the charity school, though much of their time was spent on their estate at Torquay, or in London. In the 1860s, the local hunt – the Haldon Harriers - used to meet at Dunchideock school.³⁸ The hounds' kennels, which were owned by the Palks, were built on their estate, close to *Haldon House* and *Borough Farm*, Kenn.³⁹

When the Education Act was passed in 1870, the school [also known as Haldon School] was still the only school in the parish. In December 1870 following a parish meeting, Thomas Strong, the Pitman family's tenant at the Barton and churchwarden, wrote to the Secretary of the Education Department about the existing school. Mr. Strong outlined the history of the school, and described its location as '*convenient also for outlying portions of the adjoining parishes of Kenn and Exminster*'. In his letter was the only surviving description of the school as it was. The school house, which with the adjoining cottage was still owned by Sir Lawrence Palk, contained a schoolroom which was 19 feet 3 inches long, 16 feet 4 inches wide and 14 feet high, where boys and girls were taught together. The population of the parish had been dropping throughout the 19th century; in 1870 it was about 130, but 30 pupils – some no doubt from neighbouring parishes - were still attending the school. According to Thomas Strong, nothing was paid by the pupils for this schooling (though this contradicts other evidence), and the stipend of the mistress and the repairs to the building were paid for by Sir Lawrence Palk. The parishioners at the meeting wished to know whether the school would be deemed 'sufficient' under the Act.⁴⁰

It's not clear if Isabella Long was still schoolmistress by 1870. In the following year, when the census was taken, she was no longer there; still described as a schoolmistress, she was living alone in the village of Stakes, in the parish of Farlington, Hampshire.⁴¹ A new schoolmistress - Mary Eliza Thomas, born in Chepstow, Monmouthshire - was living in at the Haldon School in April 1871.⁴² The inspection carried out in August that year was not favourable – Mr Howard stated in his report that the instruction was '*barely efficient, but that it may be allowed to pass for one year*'.⁴³ Clearly, improvements were necessary, but it was to be several more years before efforts to improve the accommodation and quality of schooling in the parish came to fruition.

³⁶ 1861 census, Devon, Torquay, Tormoham parish.

³⁷ The building opposite the church which had been the old rectory house – the priest's house – divided later into several cottages. Five years later, in 1866, Martha Crispin died and was buried in Dunchideock churchyard.

³⁸ *Western Times*, Friday January 2, 1863, digitised on British Newspaper Archive.

³⁹ Iain Fraser, *The Palk Family: Haldon House & Torquay*, Newton Abbot, 2008, p.69.

⁴⁰ ED21/3537 (The National Archives/TNA).

⁴¹ 1871 census, Hampshire, Farlington parish.

⁴² 1871 census, Devon, Dunchideock parish.

⁴³ ED21/3537 (The National Archives/TNA).