

DEVON VICTORIAN SCHOOLS PROJECT - MARWOOD SCHOOLS

Situated some three miles north-north-west of Barnstaple (see figure 1 below) Marwood has been described as “a large and beautiful parish, with wooded combes, open downland, and a number of interesting farmhouses” (1). Small hamlets dispersed over the parish’s five thousand acres, rising at Hewish Down Beacon to 859 feet, have over the centuries been connected by winding lanes and bordered by tall earth banks. Many of the farmsteads and hamlets still in existence today had their origins in Saxon and early medieval times (2). As well as Marwood itself, hamlets of an early date included Blakewell, Guineaford, Honeywell, Kings Heanton, Lee, Metcombe, Milltown, Muddiford, Patsford, Prixford, Swindon Down, Townridden, Varley, Westcott, Whiddon and Whitefield (3), and were vibrant and self-sufficient but occupied almost entirely by large, low income rural families.



Figure 1 – Map showing the location of Marwood (4)

Foundation and Governance

(a) Marwood Church of England School - The first recorded efforts towards making formal education a possibility for the children of the parish occurred towards the turn of the nineteenth century, some details of which were recorded by the report of the Charity Commissioners in 1823 and on a board in St Michael and All Angels Church (see figure 2 below). The first was a bequest made by Reverend Richard Harding, who served as the parish rector from 1714 until his death in 1782 aged 95 years. By his will dated 10 June 1779, £150 was to be invested in three per cent consols (shares), the proceeds being paid to an able and deserving man or woman to teach 5 or 6 poor children of the parish. A second bequest was that made by William Westacott, described by Lysons in *Magna Britannica* as a farm labourer, who having “by his industry and saving habits accumulated a fortune of £750” (5). By his will dated 15 December 1810, money was also to be invested in three per cent shares for the benefit of the school.

Teaching at the church-house school carried on until closure in 1891, and continued to support the education of those who could not afford the fees, until a change in the law meant they were no longer payable. The bequests from the legacies of Harding and Westacott were transferred to the National School, with a proportion being allocated to the Education Committee of Devon County Council (6).

(b) Marwood National School - In 1851 the population of Marwood peaked at 1,054 for the nineteenth century (see figure 3 below), the later decline being partly explained by the migration of farm labourers with no alternative but to look elsewhere for work. Some moved to Barnstaple for different employment, but for others farm work was their only skill, therefore they journeyed overseas to

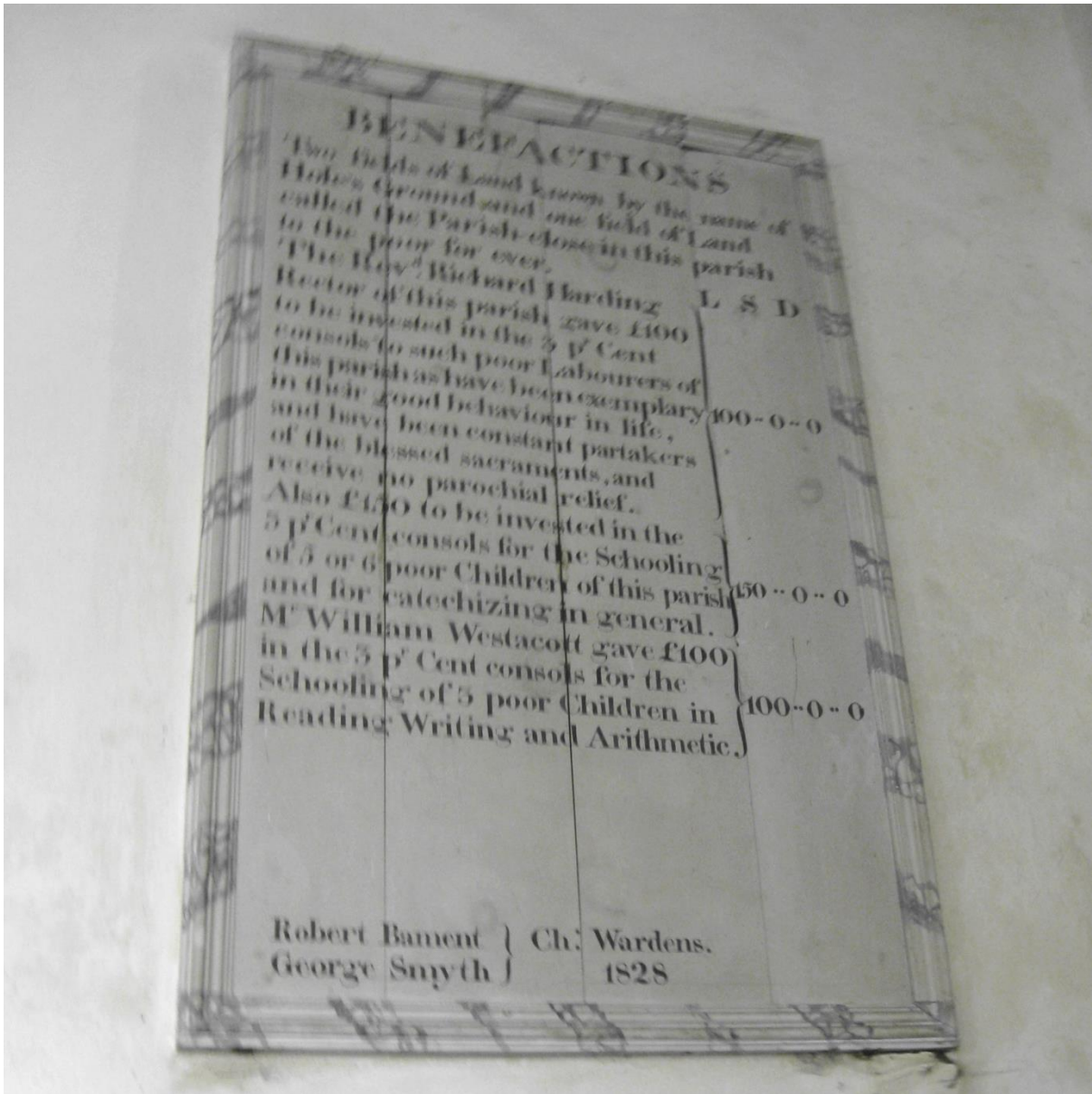


Figure 2 – Wall plaque in St Michael and All Angels parish church in Marwood

Australia, New Zealand or Canada. The evolutionary nature of farming also had a knock on effect on local crafts people whose livelihoods depended on the industry, such that the variety of existing trades began to diminish.

Date	1801	1833	1851	1871	1891	1901
Population	632	944	1054	995	787	612

Figure 3: Population of Marwood during the nineteenth century (7)

Before the decline in population began, however, there was a recognised need for the education of children, and the first purpose built school, a National School, was erected in 1857 after the arrival in 1853 of a new parish rector, Reverend Frederick Collison (1815-1889), incumbent until 1886. He soon concluded that the current educational provision was inadequate, and wrote to the Barnstaple Board of Education in 1855 (8) stating the case for a new school to be built:

Marwood Rectory
October 21st

My dear Sir

I wish to make application to the Board of Education for assistance towards building schoolrooms in this parish. The population exceeds 1000 and there is no building secured to the Church for such a purpose. At present the boys' school and Sunday school are held at the church-house – but this building is in a dilapidated condition and is held by Feoffees whose power of conveying the site may be doubted. With such a population I think there ought to be schoolrooms capable of accommodating about 140 children (70 of each sex) and if sufficient funds can be raised I should wish to build also a master's house.

I am not yet prepared with any plan or estimate but of course I should not expect the Board to pay any grant that they may be disposed to make until I can satisfy them that the buildings are suitable and substantial and erected upon a site legally secured.

I remain my dear sir

Yours faithfully

F W Collison

(c) Methodist Chapel School - The clergy of the Church of England, such as Reverend Collison, were mostly university educated and from privileged backgrounds, and their lives could hardly be further removed from those of congregations in rural parishes. Knowing very little about farming or country pursuits like hunting or other game activities, they often failed to relate to either the working classes, or indeed the landed gentry. This was exactly the state of affairs when the Reverend Richard Riley ⁽⁹⁾ became the incumbent in 1804. It was therefore no surprise to see the Methodist movement introduced to Marwood in 1806, when a local preacher first held services attracting fourteen members at Blakewell Farm (home of the Laramy family). By agreement with the landowner, Philip Laramy, a chapel costing £164 was duly completed and was opened on Good Friday 1829; and it may have been here that a small number of poor children were given instruction ⁽¹⁰⁾

However, it was not until 9 October 1874 that a new Methodist chapel held its opening service, one year after the foundation stone was laid. The collections taken on that day combined with the generous gifts donated by the congregation remarkably covered the cost of all the works undertaken without leaving any debt. In 1858 the will of Mary Ann Tamlyn of Prixford bequeathed the sum of £100 to be invested for the benefit of the (former) Methodist chapel and a Sunday school. Following the opening of the new chapel, it was formally decided on 6 January 1874 to convert the former chapel building into a day school, which quickly became popular with the children of local parishioners ⁽¹¹⁾. However, the Chapel School (see figure 7 below) remained open for only two years - its future being determined by the Elementary Education Act of 1870.

(d) Other schools - As well as Sunday schools in the parish, it was also reported that a School of Industry for 16 girls had been established since 1818 ⁽¹²⁾, where each child received instruction in spinning wool, knitting, sewing and embroidery. The idea was to make each school self-supporting through the sale of work done by the pupils, who would be allowed to keep some of the money that they earned. In most schools of industry, the children would have been taught reading and writing, but there was always the temptation to emphasise the occupational aspect in order to cover expenses. In some areas, no poor persons would be eligible for relief unless their children were sent to the school, or could prove that satisfactory employment had been found for them ⁽¹³⁾. In addition, from the early to mid-nineteenth century women ran what became known as 'dame' schools in their homes, and these were known to exist locally in Muddiford, Milltown and Middle Marwood (see figure 4 below). Normally there was a charge made for each child of up to three pence a week to be taught mainly reading and writing. Some schools provided an acceptable standard, but mostly the quality of education was variable, especially if the literacy of the 'dame' was inadequate such that they could be

described as little more than child minders ⁽¹⁴⁾. By the late 1870s and early 1880s, these schools closed and the pupils were transferred to the Board School ⁽¹⁵⁾.



Figure 4: A house in Middle Marwood once used as a Dame School

Premises

(a) Marwood Church of England School - By the time of Reverend Harding's bequest, there was already a two-storey church-house in use, which stood on the left of the lych-gate to the courtyard. It was a stone and slate building with an external stone staircase to the chamber or upper room, so often a feature of ancient church-houses. The lower storey, open at the side, was formerly used as a stable for persons coming to the church on horseback. This was converted into living quarters to accommodate some of the poorer families of the parish, leaving a fair sized room on the upper floor for use by the school ⁽¹⁶⁾ (see figure 5 below). (In 1859 Miss Harriet Cutcliffe of Marwood Hill purchased the church-house - together with the poorhouse - for £250 and made some renovations to it, but it continued to have the same usage ⁽¹⁷⁾.)



Figure 5: Marwood's first school was located in the church-house, now known as the Lych-gate Rooms.

Evidently, the case put forward by the Reverend Collison was successful and he was given the go-ahead for his plan to identify a suitable site, and he set about gaining financial support from local gentry. Enclosing detailed plans he wrote to the Board again in 1856 ⁽¹⁸⁾:

Marwood Rectory
April 19th 1856

My dear Sir,

I beg to submit to the Barnstaple Board of Education the plans and estimate for a National School at Marwood. My intention is to build it on a portion of the Glebe, which will be conveyed to the Archdeacon as trustee according to a form of conveyance, by the cost of fencing and of additional internal fittings to (probably not less than) two hundred guineas. To meet this sum, I have received £89 14s.0d. from landowners, persons interested in the parish and private friends – including £20 from myself, and I hope to raise £40 more from similar sources.

I have applied to the National Society – their grant (judging by what they have done for other parishes) may be £30.

I have also applied to the committee of the council but without much hope of success as the small endowment connected with the school and my own opinions on the subject of education will prevent such management clauses as they usually insist upon. There is likely to be a considerable deficiency in consequence and I shall be truly glad of any assistance that the Board can give. I believe the circumstances of the parish are so numerous that I need say nothing of them.

Marwood National School

Builders' estimate	£180
Legal expenses, fencing, stove + other fittings, about	£30
Received or promised	£89 14s 0d
Expected from private sources	£40
Expected from National Society	<u>£30</u>
	£159 14s 0d
Deficiency	£50 6s 0d

I remain my dear sir

Yours faithfully

F W Collison

Following approval of the plan, an orchard about half-way along the lane between Guineaford and the parish church was conveyed by the Archdeacon of Barnstaple in trust for the purposes of a school by deed dated 28 February 1857. The builder, Thomas Curtis, suggested materials such as best Combe Down bath stone for the sills and window frames, quality Delabole slates for the roof, and solid oak boards for the floor. He designed a detachable partition wall on rollers for dividing the schoolroom, if required, and internal water closets for each side of it. For the era, this was a forward thinking idea for the innovation of flushing waste with no foul smell was relatively new: it was beyond the experience of most parishioners who would not have had water closets installed in their own homes ⁽¹⁹⁾. The school, built at a cost of £200 (see figure 6 below), continued to be funded by a combination of subscriptions, pupil fees, and government grants on a 'payment by results' methodology.



Figure 6: Marwood's National School founded in 1857 now used for social gatherings, and cream teas in spring and summer months



Figure 7: The old Methodist chapel used as a school, now converted into a private dwelling.

This Act made elementary education available to all children; and existing schools, including the National School at Marwood, were given six months to ensure that they met the mandatory required standards. The parish was required to look at the possibility of accommodating all children in the area at a school run by a board of locally elected ratepayers. A committee was set up to make the necessary enquiries, which found that there were 240 children between the ages of six and thirteen in the district: this made a strong case for seeking additional accommodation for a new school. A closely run ballot with no clear majority resulted in Milltown as the chosen location, which would supersede the Chapel School which at that time had 100 pupils. This decision was met with shock and disbelief, and was deeply unpopular with the residents of Marwood ⁽²⁰⁾.

On 8 December 1874 the Marwood School Board was formed and land at Whiddon was purchased for construction to begin: how the school came to be erected there has not been documented, but presumably a site was made available at a good price. A call on local landowners for financial contributions towards the new building was ignored, obliging the parish to borrow £250 for work to be finalised by the School Board. On completion at an eventual cost of £500 the Marwood Board School opened on 6 March 1876 ⁽²¹⁾.

Curriculum and the School Day

(a) Marwood Church of England School – Under the bequest made by Reverend Richard Harding pupils would be required to “read the Bible, and to learn and repeat the Church Catechism distinctly and leisurely”, and be instructed “in the principles of the Christian religion”. He specified that their lessons should be conducted in the church or church-house for an hour or more and twice each week so as to “examine, catechise and instruct them”. The bequest made by William Westcott specified that the interest should enable the teaching of two poor children writing and arithmetic, and one poor child in reading. He specified that preference should be given to children of parents who had been exemplary in their good behaviour and attendance at church ⁽²²⁾.

At the date of the 1833 report, a schoolmistress was said to be instructing at a day school 6 poor children in reading, and attending a Sunday school where the same 6 children and other poor children of the parish were being taught.

(b) Marwood National School - Examinations were held in the four ‘r’s (reading writing, arithmetic and religion), and the results, together with a satisfactory attendance score, would determine the amount given and the pay that teachers would receive.

The Teachers

(a) Marwood Church of England School - In a codicil to his will, Reverend Richard Harding appointed Rebecca Rock (1750-18XX) – marking her out as his “old and faithful servant”, and believing her to be of great probity and integrity – as schoolmistress “for so long a time as she was physically able” ⁽²³⁾. William Westcott’s bequest stipulated that the interest should be used to pay the same schoolmistress.

The Charity Commissioners Report of 1823 revealed that the dividends of the two bequests amounted to more than £11 each year, of which £7 10s.0d. was paid to Rebecca Rock. By 1822, she had become too frail to continue in her role, and she arranged for the payment of another schoolmistress, believed to be Grace Warren (1793 to 1878) of Guineaford ⁽²⁴⁾.

(b) Marwood National School - Teaching was provided through a husband and wife partnership, and the latter had to be able to instruct girls in sewing. The records of some of the schoolmasters and mistresses were as follows ⁽²⁵⁾:

1857	John Gould Elizabeth Gould	1875	John Mayne (plus Elizabeth Carpenter)
1861	Daniel Tolchard Mary Ann Tolchard	1877	Wilfred Main (who remained in post for 24 year)
1871	John Carpenter Elizabeth Carpenter (Remained after the death of her husband in 1875 until 1893)		Mary Jane Gore (succeeded Elizabeth Carpenter from 1893 until her marriage in 1895)

Notes

1. Hoskins, W G (2003): Devon (new edition) – Phillimore (Chichester), page 432.
2. Such has been the heritage and charm of Marwood that some areas have been designated as sites of special architectural and historic interest – “The London Gazette”, 29 December 1977.
3. Bowman, A-L (2011): Marwood: A Fond Encounter with a Rural Devon Parish – Merewode Books (Chippenham), page 1.
4. Streetmap: www.streetmap.co.uk. Accessed on 16 September 2015.
5. Bovett, R L (1989): Historical Notes on Devon Schools – Devon County Council (Exeter), page 206.
6. Bowman, A-L (2011): page 191.
7. Source: www.visionofbritain.org.uk/2400 . Accessed on 16 September 2015.
8. Source: North Devon Record Office (reference NDRO B6Z/11/2/3).
9. Richard Riley (1766-1853) incumbent for 49 years from 1804 to 1853 was a noted academic and Fellow of St John’s College, Cambridge. He was known for being a difficult character and unpopular with his parishioners (Bowman, 156)
10. Sellman, R R (1984): page 94 (Sellman has given the number as 16.)
11. Bowman, A-L (2011): page 198.
12. Sellman, R R (1984): Early Devon Schools – Evidence from Published and Unpublished Sources (Abstract of the answers and returns made pursuant to an address of the House of Commons dated 34 May 1833 – published as volume 2 in 1835), page 94.
13. Curtis, S J (1967: History of Education in Great Britain (7th Edition) – University Tutorial Ptes (London), page 202).
14. Bowman, A-L (2011): page 187.
15. For example, when the dame school in Muddiford closed in 1883, 4 boys and 9 girls were transferred to the Board School, which also received 17 pupils from the dame school in Milltown in the late 1870s.
16. Lysons gave 1782 and 1814 for the two bequests, which no doubt were the dates when they became effective, on demise of the testators, and this would suggest that use of the upper room of the Church House as a schoolroom may have commenced in 1782 or soon after.
17. The church-house was designated a Grade II listed building in 1984, being described as nineteenth century, with fragments of walls from an earlier building, reflecting the renovation work carried out by a carpenter, William Worth in 1859.
18. Source: North Devon Record Office (reference NDRO B6Z/19/1).
19. Bowman, A-L (2011): page 190. (The Board School did not have flushing water closets until 1901.)
20. North Devon Journal, 9 July 1874.
21. Bowman, A-L (2011): page 200.
22. Ibid., page 186.
23. Ibid., page 185.
24. The occupation of Grace Warren was recorded as schoolmistress in the Guineaford census for both 1841 and 1851.
25. Bowman, A-L (2011): page 191..