

DEVON EARLY VICTORIAN SCHOOLS PROJECT – PILTON SCHOOL

The ancient parish and village of Pilton, covering 1,861 acres, has now been partly incorporated into the town of Barnstaple, but was originally one of the four 'burhs' of Devon (1) during the reign of King Alfred (871 to 899). Indefensible on the flat basin of the River Taw, Barnstaple was dangerously exposed to attack by water. However, Pilton on the higher ground of Roborough Hill (475 feet) was able to keep guard and command the whole estuary as far as the sea, and defend the bay against assault by the Danes and Vikings.



Figure 1 – Map showing the location of Pilton (2)

Located about a quarter of a mile north of Barnstaple (see figure 1 above), Pilton was once separated from it by the River Yeo, and the surrounding marshy grounds, until the building of a bridge and causeway by Sir John Stowford (c1290 to c1372). According to the Domesday Survey of 1086 the parish of Pilton also included the villages of Pilland, Raleigh, Bradiford and Pottington.

Foundation and governance

Apart from legacies left for the schooling of poor children, little information has remained on early schools in Pilton. In an inscription on a stone in St Mary's Church, the former priory until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536, it was stated that in 1653, for teaching poor children to read, Edward Fairchild gave 13s 0d a year to be paid forever out of a rent charge for a tenement at Horridge in the parish of Heanton Punchardon. Similarly, in 1788 Walter Parminter left the same amount as a bequest in his will allowing a rent charge from his house in Pilton to be left for teaching poor children (3).

Premises

A chamber over one of the almshouses standing between the present sexton's house and the large archway was where the present Pilton Bell ⁽⁴⁾ School was founded in connection with the National Society. The school was opened on 22 October 1815 by William Saunders, the headmaster ⁽⁵⁾

By the late 1830s, however, the population had greatly increased (see figure 3 below).

Date	1801	1811	1821	1831	1841	1851
Population	831	936	1230	1819	1805	1813

Figure 2: Population of Pilton during the first half of the nineteenth century ⁽⁶⁾

Larger premises were acquired through the purchase of a site next to Pilton Church owned by Sir Arthur Chichester of Youlston. In the enrolled deed of transfer to the trustees dated 16 December 1839 the property was described as follows:

“All those two cottages and gardens situate lying and being in the parish of Pilton aforesaid adjoining the west end of the Parish Church of Pilton late in the occupation of Abel Baker, and bounded on the north by the Priory Field, on the south by the Church Path or Church Yard, on the east by the Parish Church aforesaid, and on the west by a house and garden the property of Mrs Warminton” ⁽⁷⁾

An impressive list of 47 subscribers ⁽⁸⁾ showed the considerable expense incurred in providing for the new school which opened in January 1841.

Subscriptions	£129 1s 0d
Bazaar	£128 16s 6d
National Society's grant	££25 0s 0d
Treasury grant	<u>£100 0s 0d</u>
	£382 17s 0d



Figure 3 - Pilton Bell School which opened in January 1841 ⁽⁹⁾

School Finances

In the account book of 1815 ⁽¹⁰⁾ the following items appeared:

1815	Paid Barnstaple cryer for putting up advertisements	6d
	Paid Pilton cryer for a cry	3d
	For cleaning the schoolroom chimneys and pair of bellows	3s
	A woman for washing the rooms	4d
	For quills, paper and ruler	4s 10d
	For hald dozen slates @ 10d	5s

Also, in 1827 the following monies were paid:

1827	Paid for whiteliming the school (20 July)	2s
	For repairing the desk	9d
	Painting the schoolroom	3s 6d

During the late 1820s and 1830s public notices in the local press ⁽¹¹⁾ advertised church services and the collections that would be made to help fund the school:

Bell's School, Pilton. The Public are hereby respectfully informed, that a SERMON will be preached in Pilton Church, by the Rev. James Bush, MA on the instant. After the Sermon, a collection will made at the Church Doors, in aid of the Funds of this Institution. July 17th, 1827.
North Devon Journal - Friday 20 July 1827, page 1.

On the above occasion an amount of £14 was raised, which for the time would be quite considerable, while the sermon advertised below 'reaped a harvest of £3 17s. 6d.'

BELL'S SCHOOL, PILTON. On SUNDAY, the 13th of July instant, a SERMON will be preached in Pilton Church in aid of the funds of this Institution by Rev. I. B. Jebb, B. A., of St. Peter's College, Cambridge. After the Sermon, a Collection will made at the Church doors.
Divine Service will commence precisely at Eleven o'clock. Pilton, July 4th, 1834.
North Devon Journal - Thursday 10 July 1834, page 1.

This continuation of the payment from the estate of Edward Fairchild was also featured by a notice in the local press:

FAIRCHILD'S GIFTS. Edward Fairchild, by deed dated in 1744, gave a rent-charge 13s. a year for the poor. The money paid by Mr. Lovering, the occupier of Horridge estate, in the parish of Heanton Punchardon, to the incumbent, and by him applied toward the expenses of the National Schools for which three children are educated free charge. Another rent-charge of £35., payable out of an estate called Lane, has not been received since 1829; and is, therefore, barred by the Statute of Limitations.
North Devon Journal - Thursday 16 September 1858, page 7

The first annual Government grant was made in 1867 and amounted to £38 5s 2d ⁽¹²⁾

Curriculum and the School Day

An indication of the variety of subjects studied in the school's curriculum could be measured from a notice in the local press about the annual distribution of prizes (¹³):

NATIONAL SCHOOL, PILTON. The annual distribution of prizes took place in the school-room, on Saturday last, when the following children received, as rewards, a good selection of useful and instructive books:- CLASS Scripture— Elizabeth Grigg, Alice Parfitt, and Bessie Westacott; 1st, 2nd, and 3rd prizes, respectively. Geography —William E. S. Beer, Elizabeth Darch, and Mary Ann German. Arithmetic —Edward Gliddon and Amelia Parfitt. Dictation —John Thomas and Frederick Priest. Grammar —Miriam Kuill, Hannah German, & Elfrida Kingdon. SECOND CLASS Scripture —Grace Kingdon, Laura Pincombe, and Bessie Ford. Arithmetic--Henry Watts, Jas. Mock, and John Lee. Dictation —Fanny German, James Gliddon, and Ellen Jones. Grammar —Emma Tucker, Fanny Chappie, and Emma Fuke. The third and fourth classes also received prizes in scripture, writing, and arithmetic. The examination to determine who the successful candidates for the various prizes were took place at the end of November. The answers to the different questions were made by the first and second classes on paper, and by the third and fourth on slates. The prizes were awarded by the Rev. W. C. Hall, and the children examined by Townsend M. Hall, Esq., who expressed himself highly pleased with the result.

North Devon Journal - Thursday 28 December 1865, page 5

Examples of everyday happenings at the school recorded by the headmaster may be gleaned from the school's log books (¹⁴), of which the following are extracts:

- 1863 April 1 Admitted three children from Sir Arthur Chichester's School three miles distant in Shirwell.
April 6 School very full but worked well.
April 7 Two old scholars returned. Been at work for six months, obliged to put them in a lower class than they were before leaving.
April 8 Much displeased with my first class boys on account of their copying. Spoke to them of its evil and threatened corporal punishment. Found it repeated and executed my threat.
Sept 4 School conducted by pupil teacher and one of my old paid monitors for a week during my illness.
Oct 19 Admitted 5 fresh scholars in the evening school and 2 in the day school.
Nov 6 School not very full being market day.
- 1867 Jan 4 Very severe frost, only 19 in attendance.
Jan 14 Punished several for behaviour in church yesterday.
Mar 23 Punished 5 girls for leaving playground to go gathering flowers.
May 13 Admitted a boy from Shirwell.
May 24 Queen's birthday, half holiday.
May 30 Many absent in the afternoon in consequence of the meeting of the North Devon Hussars in Barnstaple.
- 1869 May 24 Admitted 3 boys – two of them from Marwood.
May 25 Kept in several of the big girls during recreation time for playing with the boys.
June 9 Punished a boy for spending his school money.

The Teachers

A list of head teachers from 1815 to 1871 has been compiled as follows:

1815	William Saunders	1847	Mr Parsons
1818	John Hooper	1850	Mr Hunt
1820	G White	1854	William Beer
1825	Mr Bear	1866	W Thomas
1830	John Lemon	1867	Charles Jarman
1837	Mr Howard	1869	Miss M J Souch
1841	Henry Dendle	1871	Henry Fry

Figure 4 – List of headteachers at Pilton School from 1815 to 1871 (15).

It would appear that the length of time in post as headteacher at this school was a little shorter relatively to some other schools in the area.

The initial appointment of William Saunders at a salary of £45 per annum was in consideration of his wife being engaged with him for instructing the girls in knitting and sewing pain work. But the appointment of John Lemon as headmaster in 1830 was made at £30 per annum exclusive of the weekly pence paid by the children (16).

Appendix

Social class: An analysis of the social status of the population of Pilton based on the occupational statistics from the 1831 census has been made as follows:

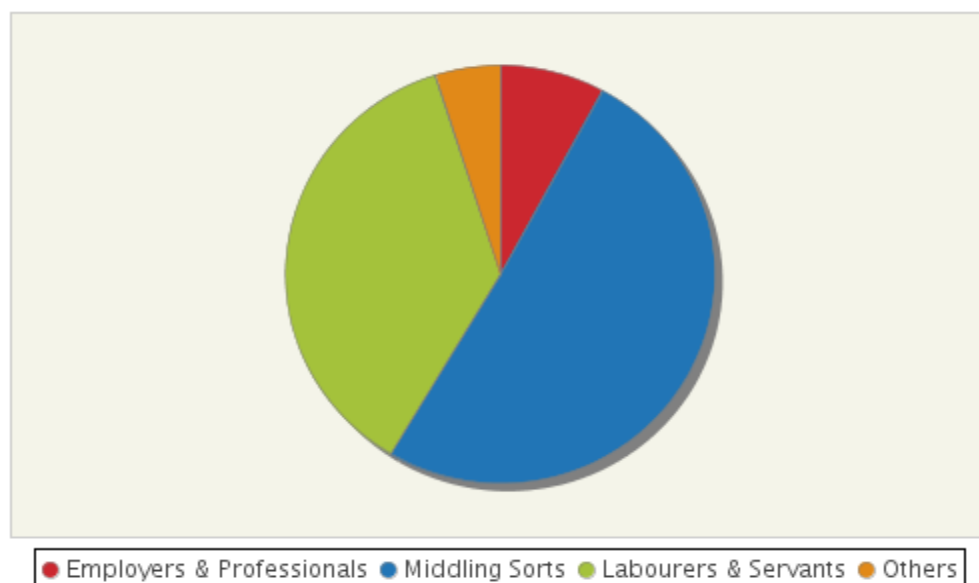


Figure 5 – Social status based on the occupational statistics from the 1831 Census (17)

Notes

I am indebted for much of this article to the previous research made by Margaret A Reed and Reginald Norman, whose works are included in the list below.

- (1) The 'burh' of Pilton was transferred during the following century to Barnstaple. The other three were Exeter, Lydford and Halwell (Hoskins, 1954, revised 2003: pages 104 and 327).
- (2) Streetmap: www.streetmap.co.uk. Accessed on 16 September 2015.
- (3) Reed, M A (1977): Pilton, Its Past and Its People – The Vanguard Press, Barnstaple (Corrected Edition, 1985) pages 202/3.
- (4) A Bell school was established under the principles of the established church on the 'Madras' system. They were named after Dr Andrew Bell, Minister of St Mary's Church, who was occupied in educating orphan children in the military asylum in Madras, India. Because of a scarcity of teachers, he was obliged to introduce a pupil teacher system whereby the able taught the less able. By this method one teacher, or monitor, could teach a large number of children at the same time in one room using standard repetitive exercises, in what has been described as an 'industrialisation' of the teaching process.
- (5) Norman, R (1967): A Short Account of Pilton School – Westwood Press, Broadstairs (a 5 page booklet), page 3.
- (6) Source: www.visionofbritain.org/uk . Accessed on 15 September 2015.
- (7) Public Record Office (C/S4/12273.22756) cited in Reed (1977) above, page 203.)The trustees were named as: Rev George Barnes (Archdeacon of Barnstaple), William Craddock Hall (curate of Pilton Church), Thomas Wrey Harding of Upcott, James Whyte of Pilton House, John May of Broadgate House, and John Rogers Griffiths and Richard Thorne of Pilton.)
- (8) Reed, M A (1977), page 235.
- (9) Norman, R (1967): page 1.
- (10) Ibid.
- (11) www.britishnewspaperonline.com – North Devon Journal. Accessed on 15 September 2015.
- (12) Norman, R (1967): page 4.
- (13) See (11) above.
- (14) Norman, R (1967): page 6.
- (15) Reed, M A (1985): page 237.
- (16) See (12) above.
- (17) See (6) above.