

## **ROSE ASH**

Rose Ash lies on the borders of mid- and north Devon. It is an agricultural parish of some 7000-8000 acres. As with many other parishes in this general area, it had no real 'centre'. The parish church and the manor house provided a focus for the scatter of population across some fifty farms and small-holdings.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the population peaked at about 570. Thereafter, there was a steady decline (by 25%, 1901) continuing to under 250 by the end of the twentieth century.

Rose Ash lacked a 'lord of the manor'. The Tanner Davy family bought the Barton (= manor house) in the first half of the nineteenth century. John Tanner Davy (1828-87) was the nearest the parish had to a squire. His father was a yeoman farmer. By force of personality (he became a Lt-colonel in the N Devon militia; he was a prominent agriculturalist; a leading freemason; and a JP), he climbed the social scale.

The Southcomb rectors, who had held the living for six generations by the time John Ladavese Hamilton Southcomb became rector in 1854, were never really leaders in the parish. Their rectory lay tucked away, half a mile from the parish church. They were well-to-do, with a glebe of 100+ acres and a tithe income after 1842 of £430 (this declined significantly over the course of the century; the agricultural depression of the late 1870s bit into tithe income).

Significantly for Rose Ash, J L H Southcomb (1817-1886) and John Tanner Davy did not 'get on'. Unusually, Southcomb, as rector, retreated, leaving the role of community leader to Tanner Davy. In the 1860s, it was John Tanner Davy who ran the National School and who, in the later 1870s, oversaw the transition to Board School.

While Rose Ash as a parish was typical of many in north Devon (and no doubt elsewhere in the county), its history in the middle years of the nineteenth century sets it apart

### **The school**

In 1845-47, Edmund Southcomb, rector 1822-1854, established a National School on a site by the church. He gave the land (on the understanding it would revert to his successors if the school failed), and he also built an adjoining school-master's house.

As far as I know, Southcomb received a grant from the National Society for the new building. There appears to have been no endowment. Southcomb, a bachelor, presumably, paid from his own pocket for what the school required. In the early 1850s, a school teacher was paid no more than £5 a year; so, the education was rudimentary and the cost negligible. By the 1860s, we get a glimpse of fees paid. These were entirely typical - in the range of 3d a week for farmers' children; 2d for artisans; and 1d a week for labourers' children.

There were parish charities. By the 1860s and '70s, a group had been amalgamated and a part of the income was dedicated to the support of children at the school. (In the course of the century, the Southcomb family established several charities for the poor of Rose Ash; by the

end of the century, we get a glimpse of how these were used to support the school - prizes for attendance etc).

By the 1860s, there were some half-dozen or so 'school managers' who assisted John Tanner Davy in financing the school. These included members of the Southcomb family (but not the rector), local clergy, and one or two local farmers. Each chipped in, with £5 here and a £1 there.

### **Admission and attendance**

We have no hard evidence before the opening of the Board School in 1878. There was no other school in the parish. We can assume that the National School catered for both boys and girls; and that it was overwhelmingly for children from the parish.\*

(A Bible-Christian congregation existed in Rose Ash, as did a Wesleyan Methodist chapel. Neither ran to a school but both ran Sunday Schools.)

\* Irishcombe, in Rose Ash parish, was a detached portion of Lapford parish. Children from Irishcombe were routinely baptised at Rose Ash and, no doubt, would have gone to the school there.

### **Teachers**

The teachers at the school were all unqualified (until the advent of the Board School). We have evidence of one male teacher and three or four female teachers. They were paid a pittance and the education they delivered was presumably pretty basic. By the mid 1870s, the school was 'failing'.

### **Governance**

The first insight we gain comes from the 1860s by which time John Tanner Davy had taken over the role of the rector and was running the school with the help of the 'managers' mentioned above. (J L H Southcomb's diary survives for the years 1871-77; it is surely significant that it contains no reference to the school. As far as we are aware, neither he nor his wife took any active role in the school - certainly from about 1861 onwards. This is quite astonishing when placed alongside the typical Victorian clergyman, active in his school.)

So, under Tanner Davy, the school was a sort of private fiefdom.

### **Premises**

The site given by Edmund Southcomb lay hard by the churchyard. The two buildings, school and house, abutted the 'poor cottages' (a kind of parish workhouse). It was these cottages which were demolished to make way for the Board School (1878). The National School then became a *de facto* village-hall. (Ironically, the former Board School is now the village hall.) The school-masters' house seems to have lost this function (presumably because the new school was no longer a Church of England school). The Board School teachers lodged in the parish.

The National School buildings survive today (as two separate cottages). They were stone-built with slate roofs. They faced south so gained sunlight. All that we can now deduce is that the school was small - probably catering for a notional 30 children (but the Victorians packed them in where necessary and what evidence survives suggests that rather more than that number attended the school).

### **Curriculum**

We have no knowledge of this prior to the Board School. No log-book survives, supposing one was kept (which is doubtful).

### **External relations**

Again, we have no insight. In the mid-1870s, it had become clear that the National School was on its last legs and that a Board School was an inevitability. J L H Southcomb was a reluctant participant in this process, grudgingly giving the government officials the information they required (there is correspondence in his letter-book (DHC 4131) and in the NA).

Tanner Davy continued to 'run' the Board School until his untimely death in 1887. Thereafter, his wife Charlotte became an elected Board member.

### **Sources**

The very scattered evidence for the National School and for the charities comes from scraps I retrieved from the church vestry and deposited in NDRO (in the Rose Ash deposit, B 678). The Board School log-book is in NDRO as is the admission-register of the school. The NA contain valuable evidence of the closure of the school in the 1870s. The Southcomb deposit (DHC 4131) is useful, especially Southcomb's letter-book. His diaries are in the Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. I have a photo-copy of the 1871-77 volume.

NB there is no final 'é' in Southcomb; they were very particular about this.