

Early Victorian Elementary Schools – Tiverton

Tiverton owes its early prosperity to the woollen trade on which Peter Blundell and his nephew Robert Chilcott built their fortunes. In their wills, they left directions for the foundation and endowment of schools for boys, principally of Tiverton. Peter Blundell's school was a grammar school, whereas Robert Chilcott's school was an elementary school. In 1713 another charity school, the Blue Coat School was established in St Peter's Church yard to provide education for children of the poor. Initially the school was intended for boys but a year later the school was expanded for the education of girls. In the early nineteenth century, a National school was founded associated with St George's Church.

The 1833 Education Enquiry reveals that there were three principal elementary schools established for children of the poor. Those were the National School, the Blue Coat School, and Chilcott's School. There were also a number of other schools established, mostly of a private nature, including dame schools.

Sunday schools were popular with employers and parents alike since it enabled children to work during the week. At the time of the 1833 Enquiry there were four such schools. The Established Church accommodated 115 males and 130 females; the Independent Chapel about 133 males and 397 females; the Wesleyan Methodists taught 160 males and 130 females, and the Particular Baptists 93 males and 119 females. The latter was endowed with £3 per annum but all the other schools were supported by subscription, annual collections and voluntary contributions.¹

The 1841 survey for the Congregational Board of Education published in 1845 gives the Tiverton population as 10,040 with 3,543 under the age of 15.² These figures would appear to show that there was a considerable shortfall in day school places.

In the early 1840s the leading employer in the area was John Heathcoat Esq. M.P. He believed that education of the young would improve the condition of his workers in later life. In 1843, a notice was placed on the walls of the factory workshops which stated that children seeking future employment in

¹ 1833 *Education Enquiry for Tiverton*

² Authers W, *The Tiverton Congregational Church 1660-1960*

the mill would be expected 'not only to read in a creditable manner but also to write'. Heathcoat's passion for education of the poor extended to his family who were to become equally committed to providing schools for the poor.

The first school established by the family was built at the entrance to the Lace Factory in Leat Street. It was run on the lines of the British and Foreign School Society. The established churchmen may have been surprised that the school was a 'British' school but Heathcoat believed in non-denominational schooling. In a speech upon the opening of the school, he stated 'Allowing children thus to mingle together irrespective of religious distinctions tends to prevent these distinctions from rising up as barriers in after life'.³

Heathcoat was liberal in his attitude to education and although a Baptist,⁴ donated land for the building of a National (Church of England) School in the hamlet of Chevithorne, Tiverton. The Heathcoat Lace Manufactory also subscribed to the National Schools in Tiverton. Heathcoat's business partner and son in law, Mr Ambrose Brewin founded a school in Elmore Street for boys, girls and infants and an infants' school in Bampton Street.

Leat Street Factory School

Foundation and governance

The schools were opened in 1843. John Heathcoat provided the land and buildings and the infant school was the first in the town. The schools were managed by his son in law, Ambrose Brewin.

School Finances

John Heathcoat was the sole supporter of the school but the children had to pay 2d a week if the parents could afford to pay.⁵ The expenses cost 11s 10d per child.⁶ By 1870 the fees had increased to 5d, 2d, and free for poor families. There were eighteen girls and twenty boys attending free of charge.⁷

³ Allen, W Gore, *John Heathcoat and His Heritage*, p. 127, London, 1958

⁴ Harrison FMW, *The Nottinghamshire Baptists and Social Conditions*, p215

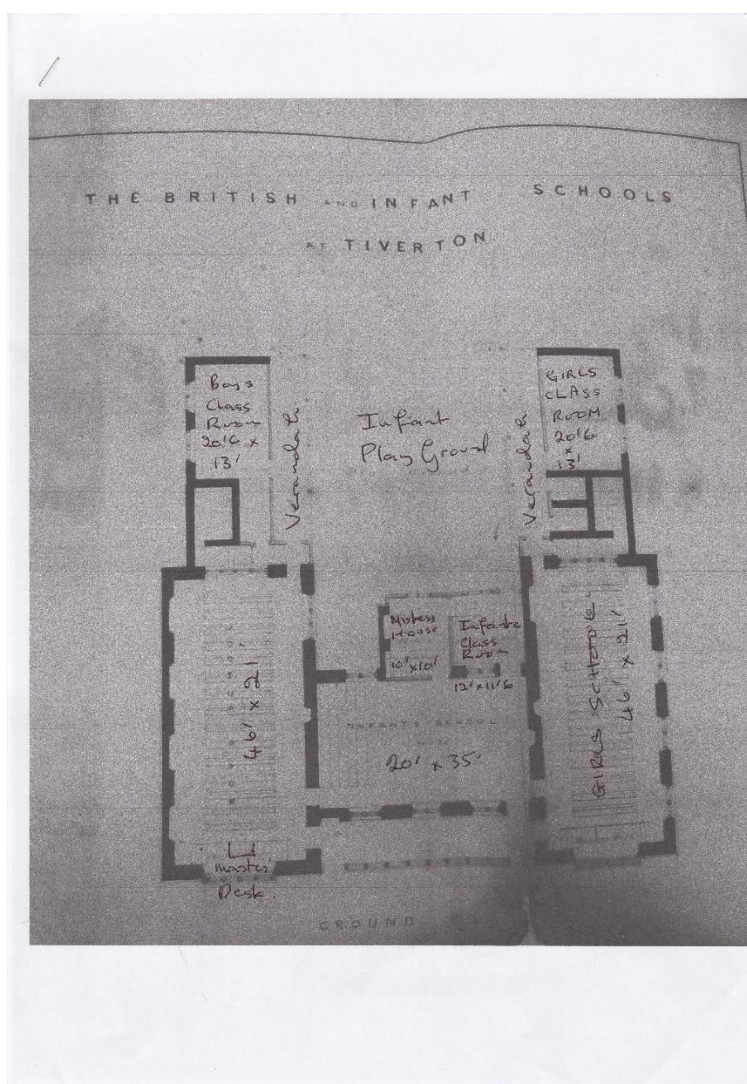
⁵ Authers, W.P. *Notes from the nineteenth century records of the Tiverton Congregational Church*, in Transactions, Devonshire Assn., 1974

⁶ Devon Heritage Centre, *Log Book of Tiverton Heathcoat Girls School, 1862-1889* 4302B/EFL1

⁷ *ibid*

Premises

An extract from the Western Times reads, 'The building which is a lofty, beautiful and elaborately finished specimen of the Tudor style consists of a centre and two wings.....The beautiful rooms are lit by large and very elegant windows, glazed in iron framing, of a gothic filigree pattern, prepared and cast by Mr Heathcoat's foundry. The walls are built of the quarry stones of the neighbourhood, square and hewn....the dressing and ornamental part being of Bath stone.' The building was designed and erected under the superintendence of Mr G A Boyce, Architect.⁸ The school comprised three school rooms for boys, girls and infants.



British & Foreign School Society Returns 1870

⁸ Western Times, 4.2.1843

Admission criteria and attendances

The school was open to children of all denominations of Christians. A condition of attendance was that the children were to attend a Sunday school. The day school was not restricted to children whose parents were employed at the Heathcoat factory.

In 1846 there were 165 boys, 133 girls and 156 infants on the register.⁹ The 1861 Register of Admission relating to the Infants School shows 104 children of whom 55 were boys and 49 were girls. Of these, thirty were factory workers' children, and the remainder were either labourers' children or those of the artisan class. Their ages ranged from 1 year 6 months to 6 years 6 months.¹⁰ This school acted as a nursery, freeing mothers to work in the factory. The boys and girls schools catered for children aged six years to above twelve years.¹¹

Curriculum

An annual examination of the boys took place in August 1846. The proceedings commenced with 'some very pleasing singing followed by reading by the lower classes and an examination by the pupils of the higher classes with very minute examinations in grammar, geography, mental arithmetic, and mathematics...' ¹²

The teachers

At the 1846 examination of the boys, the master, Mr John N Singleton was given credit for their proficiency.¹³ In 1850, the girls' mistresses were Miss Ellen Davis and Miss Sophia Pugh. The Committee of the Council of Education appointed fourteen pupil teachers to assist the master and mistresses.¹⁴ By 1870, Mr Singleton was assisted by four pupil teachers and three paid monitors. The girls' mistress was Miss Emma Ellis who was assisted by an assistant teacher, two pupil teachers and a number of monitors. Both Mr Singleton and Miss Ellis were certificated teachers.¹⁵

⁹ Tiverton Museum Archive. *Facts & Remarks relating to the Tiverton Lace Manufactory*, 9.3.1846,

¹⁰ Devon Heritage Centre, *Register of Admissions 1861*, 2745C/EFA1

¹¹ British & Foreign Schools Society, *Return 1870*

¹² Western Times 15.8.1846

¹³ Western Times 15.8.1846

¹⁴ Whites' Devonshire Directory, 1850

¹⁵ British & Foreign School Society, *Returns 1870*

Leat Street Factory night school

This was linked to the factory and might have commenced in 1836 since an article in a newspaper refers to the 23rd annual treat in 1859.

Admission criteria and attendances

All those children who were employees in the factory aged between thirteen and seventeen were expected to attend the night schools for one hour, four times a week. In 1846 there were 160 boys and 217 girls in attendance aged between ten and twenty years of age.¹⁶ In 1859 there were 366 children on the books with an average attendance of about 300.

Curriculum

The scholars were divided into sections, each section spending the time reading for one night, writing the next and receiving instruction in arithmetic on the third night. The first section of boys would then be taught history and geography. The girls were taught sewing, mending and making, together with 'the art of domestic life'. The latter subject was considered beneficial at the time since so many mothers and daughters worked and consequently, they lacked a knowledge of housekeeping. Once the girls had made a shirt, they could progress to 'fancy work'. There was a singing class once a week and a library for the use of the boys and girls of the first section.

The teachers

In 1861 the schools were managed by Mr Joseph Foster who had joined the school in 1856. He also prescribed the lessons. He was assisted by 18 male and female teachers all of whom held situations in the factory. The singing lessons were taken by Mr Metcalf.¹⁷

Festivities

In July 1866 about 300 scholars belonging to the Night School assembled in the factory yard and processed through the town waving flags as they went. They were dressed in their best clothes, and a number of girls carried bouquets of flowers. When they arrived at a field near to the residence of Mr Heathcoat Amory, they enjoyed coffee and cake. A selection of the party sang a number

¹⁶ Tiverton Museum Archive, *Facts & Remarks relating to the Tiverton Lace Manufactory 9.3.1846*,

¹⁷ Tiverton Gazette 30.4.1861

of songs under the direction of Mr Metcalf, the singing teacher. This was followed by a number of activities including an enjoyable game of football.¹⁸

The Brewin Schools (Elmore Street School & Bampton Street Infants School)

Foundation and Governance

The infants' school was built in Bampton Street by Mr Ambrose Brewin in 1847 and the Elmore Street School in 1848, both at his sole expense.¹⁹ His wife Caroline shared his enthusiasm for schooling for the poor and together with her sister, Miss Eloise Heathcoat was involved in the life of the schools which included running a clothing club and other philanthropic acts. The 'British' system of teaching was adopted. After the death of Mr Brewin, Caroline Brewin conveyed the premises by a deed of trust to the Mayor and Burgesses of the town of Tiverton in 1855. However, this was on condition that during her lifetime, Mrs Brewin would have the sole, uncontrolled management and direction of the schools. After her death, the management was to be vested in the Rector of Tidcombe Parish and the Mayor and Burgesses of Tiverton.²⁰

Elmore Street School

Funding

Mr Brewin was responsible for the running costs of the school and the children paid either 1d or 2d per week.

The premises

The school was built in stone rubble with dressings of squared stone; with cast iron window sills, under slated roofs. It was described as a substantial building to accommodate 100 boys and 50 girls. The Infants school was for 100 pupils.²¹

Admission and attendances

Unlike the factory school, there was no condition of entry upon the necessity to attend church or a Sunday school. In 1846 there were 85 children on the register.²² The British School Society return for the school in September 1870

¹⁸ Western Times, 24.7.1866

¹⁹ White's Devonshire Directory 1850

²⁰ Tiverton Gazette 28.11.1876

²¹ White's Devonshire Directory, 1850

²² Tiverton Museum Archive, *Facts & Remarks relating to the Tiverton Lace Manufactory* 9.3.1846,

shows the average attendance to be 125. The ages of the children were given as 80 children under six years, 35 from six to eight, 24 from eight to ten and 10 from ten to twelve together with 5 above twelve years. The number present on the return was 111.²³

Teachers

Initially, there was a master, mistress and 6 pupil teachers. By 1870 there was a mistress called Emily Potter and three pupil teachers. Emily Potter had trained at Borough Road College, London in 1857.

Bampton Street Infant School

Funding

The school was principally funded by Mr Brewin. The children paid 1d per week. All books and school requisites were supplied by Brewin

Premises

The school was built to accommodate 130 infants.

Admission and Attendance

There were no conditions on entry. The average attendance was 120. There were 100 under six years and 30 from six to eight. The number present on the return, 116.

Teachers

The mistress in 1870 was Helen Marlow and there were two pupil teachers. Helen Marlow had trained at the Home and Colonial College.²⁴

Chevithorne Church of England schools, Tiverton

Foundation and governance

Plans for the establishment of schools in close proximity to the church were agreed in December 1856. They included the construction of a residence for the mistress. The schools were to be built upon land given by Mr John Heathcoat, MP. At a meeting held on October 3, 1857, chaired by Mr Heathcoat Amory, the committee agreed that the building should be used as a day school for 27 boys and 27 girls and also a Sunday school 'as the principal

²³ British & Foreign School Society, *School Return for Elmore School 2.9.1870*

²⁴ British & Foreign Schools Society, *School Returns for Bampton Street School, dated 1.9.1870*

incumbent may direct'. Rev. Hughes was elected as Secretary to the committee.

School Finances

In November, 1857 the Committee agreed 'that the application for the government grant be forthwith signed and forwarded to the Secretary of the Privy Council.' It amounted to £250.²⁵ In fact, £195 was granted. A statement claimed the reason for financial assistance was that a school was needed in the district as there were only three dame schools in existence.

Funds were in short supply since the inhabitants of the district were wholly tenant farmers and their labourers. The population was 400. 19 out of 21 rate payers in the parish subscribed towards the school fund and amongst the other contributors were Rev. R Wayer, Rector of Tidcombe Portion who gave £200, Viscount Palmerston £20, and the Bishop of Exeter £20. The cost of the school building was £670. In addition, the children's fees at 2d each per week contributed towards the maintenance of the school.

Premises

The architect appointed was Mr Edward Ashworth of Exeter. The contractors were Messrs Gath and Williams and Mr Parish of Tiverton. The building was constructed in stone under a red tiled roof. There was a beautiful stained-glass window depicting three images, one showing the Saviour with the doctors in the temple, the other, Christ blessing little children and a third, children singing Hosannas in the temple. The window was the gift of Mr Wailes.²⁶ The school room was 30 ft. x 16 ft. with a height of 12ft. 6 inches and the class room 14 ft. x 12 ft.²⁷

Admission criteria and attendances

The Log Book 1863-4 reveals an average attendance for the year of 39 boys and 27 girls.²⁸

Curriculum

The Inspector's report for 1867 shows:

²⁵ Devon Heritage Centre, *Minute book and school portfolio* 2986M/PE1-2

²⁶ Western Times, 17.10.1857

²⁷ Devon Heritage Centre, *Minute book and school portfolio* 1986M/PE1-2

²⁸ Devon Heritage Centre, *School Log Books* EFL1

Average number in attendance for the year: 61

Presented for examination: 57

Passes in reading: 47

Passes in writing: 57

Passes in arithmetic: 48²⁹

The teachers

At the October 1857 meeting of the management committee it was agreed that Miss Cann, who had been recommended by Rev. Newcombe, be engaged as school mistress. She should be paid £25 per annum together with lodgings. At the following meeting in November, it was agreed that a second teacher be employed at £60 per annum. A Mr Solomon was engaged. He was a certified teacher, first class, third division.³⁰

It was noted that Miss Cann having served an apprenticeship as a pupil teacher could not be admitted for the examination for a certificate of merit until she had been assistant or principal mistress of a school (under inspection) for three years.³¹

By 1860 there was no mention of Miss Cann in the school log books. The Inspector's report mentions a Master, Mr. Lovering.

New National School, St Andrews Street

Foundation and Governance

In January 1815 a Sunday School was established followed by the foundation of a National School in 1818. When it was necessary to enlarge the school, it was decided to move to a new site in St Andrew's Street. The foundation stone of the new school was laid by Mr J Heathcoat, MP in 1841 and opened in 1844. The schools comprised a boys school and a girls school together with a Sunday

²⁹ Devon Heritage Centre, *School Log Books* EFL1

³⁰ Devon Heritage Centre, *Minute book*, 2986M/PE1-2

³¹ Devon Heritage Centre, *School portfolio* 2986M/PE1-2

school. The Secretary and Treasurer of the management committee was Mr Edward Kirwan.³² The school was closely associated with St George's Church.³³

School Funding

It would seem that funding was always a problem from its foundation, and continued throughout the period studied. By 1845, the school was not entirely completed and sermons were preached at each of the churches in the town by the Rev. Dr. Boulton in aid of the schools. He called for a very strenuous effort to be made on the part of members of the church in order to effect its completion.³⁴

Over the years which followed, many fund raising events were organised, usually by the ladies' committee and ranged from fancy dress balls to sales of fancy work. Unlike the other schools in the town, the National Schools had no major benefactor or endowment and were supported mainly by subscription and various means of fund raising.

Premises

The Architect employed was Mr Hayward of Exeter and the Builder was Mr Perkins. The buildings covered an area of 6000 sq. feet having a frontage of 90 feet in breadth. The school rooms were in the two gabled wings with the teacher's accommodation in the centre. The building was constructed in sandstone from quarries on the lands of Rev. T Carew of Collipriest with the quoins and facings for the windows made of free stone. It was designed to accommodate 500 children.³⁵

By 1857 the schools had been placed under government inspection and were to undergo extensive repairs. The lime and sand floors were to be replaced by board, the roofs to be 'ceiled', and the internal walls plastered. The cost was calculated at about £245. The Committee of Council on Education contributed the sum of £137 towards the costs. The remainder was raised by subscriptions.³⁶

³² Exeter & Plymouth Gazette 24.1.1841

³³ Giles D and Strong P., *The Blue Coat School, Tiverton*, 1984

³⁴ Exeter & Plymouth Gazette 15.11.1845

³⁵ Exeter & Plymouth Gazette 24.4.1841

³⁶ Western Times 14.11.1857

Admission criteria and attendances

In 1850 there were 140 boys and 80 girls in attendance.³⁷

Teachers

There was a master and a mistress together with a pupil teacher. An advertisement in 1857 reads 'Pupil teacher wanted – a youth about 15 is wanted for Tiverton National Schools. He must unite habits with fair mental ability, and be prepared to undergo a candidate's examination at Exeter in a few days.'³⁸

The Bluecoat Charity School

Foundation and Governance

The Rev. John Newte founded the school in 1713 to provide elementary education for sixty boys. A year later the school was extended to accommodate fifty girls. It was governed by trustees elected nominally for one year. The financial situation of the school was in an unhealthy state in the early nineteenth century but this improved after the appointment of the Rev. Spurway as Treasurer in 1827. He retired thirty two years later when a Mr Richard Tucker was appointed clerk and treasurer. He was paid 2.5% of the income from the endowments.

School Funding

Funding was obtained in part from collections at quarterly charity sermons at St Peter's Church and subscriptions but after 1792, endowments became the major funding source. One such endowment was provided by Mary Peard who placed in trust certain lands, the rents of which were to be used for the benefit 'of the Tiverton Blue Coat School, established in Tiverton, for the purpose of providing clothes and educating boys and girls, children of poor parents, in reading, writing and arithmetic, knitting, sewing and other useful instruction'.³⁹

Premises

Originally, the school was located in a building in St Peter's churchyard. A decision noted in the Minute Book to move to purpose built premises in Frog

³⁷ White's Devonshire Directory of 1850

³⁸ Exeter & Plymouth Gazette 14.3.1857

³⁹ Arnold N, *A Brief Account of the History of Tiverton Grammar School 1611-1969*

Street, now Castle Street, was recorded in 1838 at an estimated cost of £1,000. The school, together with 'a comfortable residence for the master and mistress' was built by Mr G A Boyce who drew up the plans and supervised the building operations. The school moved to these new premises in 1842. Harding (1847)⁴⁰ puts the total cost at £3,000.

Curriculum

The curriculum for girls in 1838 was reading, needlework, knitting and religious education. In addition, the twelve oldest girls were instructed three times a week in writing and arithmetic. Lessons for boys included religious knowledge, reading, writing, arithmetic and accounts.⁴¹ This would seem to indicate that although the school was an elementary school, it provided a slightly broader education than that of other elementary schools. However, some years later in 1869 the Rev. J Berkley was critical of the girls' school in his report on his inspection. He believed that the only good thing was the needlework. On the other hand, his report on the boys' school was very favourable.

Admission criteria and attendances

Entry to the school was by nomination by the subscribers. There appears to have been a desire to restrict admission to children of the respectable poor. The children were required to attend church regularly. The school day was set at eight hours in the summer but at only five and a half hours in the winter months. The children were provided with the standard 'bluecoat' uniforms, some of which were made by the girls. The boys' uniform was of blue course material cut in the style of the early 18th century. The girls wore a blue dress with white collar, cuffs, apron and cap. The 1833 Education Enquiry of 1833 reveals that there were 50 males and 52 females in attendance. By 1847 there were 39 boys and 37 girls on the registers. Under the foundation, boys were admitted at seven years of age and allowed to remain until the age of twelve. Girls entered at eight and stayed until they were fourteen.⁴²

Teachers

⁴⁰ Harding, W, *The History of Tiverton*, Vol.2

⁴¹ Dunsford Martin, & later edition by Boyce G, *History of Tiverton*

⁴² Tiverton Museum Archive, Arnold N, *A brief account of the History of Tiverton Grammar School 1611-1969*, 2016,

Masters: John Quick 1829-65; G Cowell 1865-77 at a salary of £60p.a.

Mistresses: Mrs Sharland 1828-64 at a salary of £20 p.a.; Miss Beck 1862-77 at a salary of £20 p.a.

Closure of the school

The implementation of the Endowed Schools Act of 1869 resulted in the redistribution of educational endowments in relation to the school. In 1877 the clerk reported that he had received the approval of the Privy Council for the Charity Commissioner's Scheme and that '...this Charity would henceforth be administered with the endowments thereof as one foundation under the name of Tiverton Middle Schools'.⁴³ It is thought that the Charity Commissioners based their decision to redirect the endowments to the Middle Schools since there was sufficient provision of elementary schools in Tiverton at that time.

Chilcott's English Free School

Foundation and Governance

Robert Comyn, alias Chilcott, by his will of 1609 directed his executors to build a school at the cost of £400, and vest it in thirteen trustees, to whom he left a yearly rent-charge of £90. The master should be a single man.⁴⁴ There were still thirteen trustees in a report dated 1826, one of whom was John Heathcoat.

School Funding

As well as the endowment referred to above, other legacies from local merchants and gentry were included. The boys paid 6d. on entry and those who learned arithmetic paid 1s. 6d. per quarter.

Premises

The school was a single storey building situated in Peter Street built with squared purplish stone rubble with most details in dressed limestone, possibly from Beer. The front doorway appears to be of a local volcanic stone, refaced with cement. The front has 4 mullioned and transomed windows of 4 lights

⁴³ Giles D and Strong P, *The Blue Coat School, Tiverton*, p.92

⁴⁴ Public Charities : *Analytical Digest of the reports made by the Commissioners of Inquiry into charities 1826*

each with king mullions; ogee-moulded mullions, continued hood moulds. At the left-hand end is a round-arched doorway with moulded jambs, imposts and archivolt; keystone projects, and appears originally to have had a pendant.

Above the door is a square moulded plaque with inscription: Robert Comin als Chilcot borne in this towne founded this free English Schoole and indowd it with maintenance for ever anno dni. 1611. The schoolroom consists of an open hall 49' x 20' along the street frontage with a through-passage at the left-hand end and a gallery above the passage. The Headmaster's house lies behind, to the right-hand end. It is a 2-storey building with a 3-window front facing the courtyard.⁴⁵

Curriculum

Pupils were taught only reading and writing unless they paid for tuition in arithmetic.

Admission criteria and attendances

There were to be no girls admitted. The establishment was intended to be for the benefit of 100 boys from Tiverton and surrounding district. Boys were not permitted to attend after the age of 21 years. In 1833 there were 90 males recorded.⁴⁶ The figures fluctuated since in 1841, 70 boys are recorded but in 1852, 100 boys were in attendance.⁴⁷

Teachers

In 1833 the master was Mr George Beck followed by Mr Robert Perkins in 1839. In 1852 the master taught reading and writing to the boys on the National Society's system. He had a yearly salary of £20, and was allowed 2s. 6d. per quarter for each of the boys for pens, ink, and paper.⁴⁸

Closure

The school building was still being used as a school in 1906. Chilcott's legacy together with other legacies and funding from both the Caroline Brewin Trust and Lord Amory were used towards a new co-educational Grammar School opened by Lord Amory in 1958.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ <http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk> accessed 1.5.2017

⁴⁶ 1833 Education Enquiry for Tiverton borough & parish

⁴⁷ Giles D and Strong P, *The Blue Coat School, Tiverton*, p.87

⁴⁸ White's Devonshire Directory 1850

⁴⁹ Tiverton Museum Schools folder, *History of Tiverton Grammar School*

Other small schools

An Independent school associated with the Independent Chapel was erected in 1837 together with a dwelling house. The land was purchased for £515; the cost of the school building £668.18s. 3d. and the dwelling house £790. 16s. 8d.⁵⁰

The Bolham school was opened by the Independent Church in 1850. It was to accommodate 150 boys, girls and infants. In September 1870 there were 41 scholars on the books, 9 pupils under the age of six years, 30 between the age of six and twelve and 2 over twelve years of age, but on the day recorded, only 27 present. The children's parents paid 2d. per week for one child or 3d. for two of the same family. There was one teacher named Miss H Pester.⁵¹

Cove School was funded from the legacy of Rev. John Newte when provision was made for 12 children to be taught to read.

The Withleigh National School was built near to the church in 1849.

The above mentioned schools became Board schools in 1874.

Sunday Schools

The Ecclesiastical Census Returns for Tiverton in March 1851 record the following Sunday schools with average attendance:

	Average attendance	morning	afternoon
St John's Roman Catholic School		6	
St Peters Chapel (Independent)		350	370
Elmore Chapel (Congregationalists)		180	180
Wesleyan Methodists		143	
St Andrew Bible Christians		40	50
Castle Street Particular Baptists		200	233

⁵⁰ Harding, FGS, *History of Tiverton in the County of Devon* p.262, Vol. I. Tiverton, 1845

⁵¹ British & Foreign School Society, *School Return 1870*.

It is not known whether the morning and afternoon sessions were attended by the same children or different children. No ages are given.⁵² However, in spite of the fact that new schools had opened since the Educational Enquiry of 1833, a significant number of children still attended Sunday school in 1851. This could be explained in terms of need to gain extra tuition as many children were still not attending full time school, or it could be of a religious nature.

Helen Turnbull

⁵² National Archives, Ref HO129/293 Tiverton