

Report On

Early Victorian Schools in
the Parish of Widecombe in the Moor,
Devon

1833 to 1870

A time of change in the Parish of Widecombe in the Moor

By

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Early Victorian Schools in the Parish of Widecombe in the Moor, Devon

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Note on Sources:

The main sources from which information in this report have been obtained are:

- The Widecombe and Dartmoor Charity Schools Account Book, 1796 to 1875
- The Indenture of January 22nd 1814
- The Indenture of February 29th 1842

For brevity these sources are called 'Account Book', 'Indenture 1814' and 'Indenture 1842' in the report and are not generally footnoted. For more information, sources etc. see the Bibliography and the Archive Sources at the end of report.

Introduction

This is a report concerning the schools in the civil parish of Widecombe in the Moor for the period from 1833 to 1870. It concentrates on the parish as it is known today, which no longer includes the Forest of Dartmoor, an area to the west of the present boundary. There were schools in this Forest area but for the sake of brevity these are not included here in any detail. Where they are mentioned they are highlighted with an asterisk.

Widecombe is one of the larger of the parishes in Devon stretching from Dartmeet in the West to Widecombe in the East, and from Newbridge in the South to Hedge Barton in the north. It occupies an area of just over 4,290 hectares (16.56 square miles) of which 1,860 hectares are open moorland and is made up of a number of small hamlets, most of which probably had a Dame School¹, or Hedge School (as Robert Dymond called rural schools²), in the vicinity. Geographically the parish of Widecombe is set apart from the surrounding area, being situated at a much higher altitude, with the consequence of a colder and more extreme climate. In the period that is covered it was mainly a self-sufficient community of farmers, who eked out a living on small farms, some tin miners, and the necessary support workers such as agricultural labourers, stone masons, thatchers, blacksmiths, carpenters, millers, boot/shoemakers, shop keepers, tailors, etc.³

At the end of the eighteenth century a change took place in the education of those living in the Parish of Widecombe. No doubt there had been Dame Schools in the Parish, but it was about 1796 that the Widecombe & Dartmoor Schools Charity was formed with the purpose of providing education for the poor, bringing about a change and structure to the education of the poor in Widecombe Parish⁴.

This report concentrates on the situation between 1833 and 1870. By this time the Charity was well established and it would appear that initially there were four main schools in the Parish that it supported. These were described as Dame Schools – these were at Ponsworthy, Poundsgate, Dunstone⁵ and, from 1835, Widecombe Town.⁶ In addition from 1855 in Widecombe Parish at Leusdon there was another school built, not supported by the Charity, but paid for by its benefactor, Mrs Larpent of Torquay.

The 1851 census also shows that some children were schooled at home. For instance the census states that Henry Caunter of Bittleford, a carpenter at a tin mine, had four children and they were schooled at home.

¹ A dame school is defined by Merriam Webster dictionary.com as a school in which the rudiments of reading & writing were taught usually by a woman in her own home

² Dymond, Robert 1876

³ From the 1851 and 1861 census

⁴ Stanbrook, 1991 page 68 and the Account Book

⁵ Enquiry 1831

⁶ Enquiry, 1846-7 and the Account Book

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Both the Charity Schools and Leusdon School will be covered in this report. The Schools supported by the Charity will be dealt with collectively but discussed individually where there are differences.

Place names:

To be consistent only one form of spelling has used for the following places, shown in bold below. Other forms of spelling that have been used are also listed:

Dunstone: Dunston, Dunstan

Leusdon: Leusden

Ponsworthy: Pondsworthy

Widecombe: Widdecombe, Widdicombe, Withicombe, Withycombe

Widecombe Town: is what is now known as Widecombe Village

Widecombe & Dartmoor Charity Schools:

Foundation & Governance:

From the date of the Widecombe & Dartmoor Schools Charity Account Book it would appear that a Trust was formed prior to 1796 and the interest from the money in the Trust helped to finance the Charity schools.

Mary Stanbrook says that, 'It was in 1796 that the sum of £142, given by a Miss White and others and invested at 5% was administered by trustees for the education of poor children of the parish'⁷, although an indenture or other document has not been found by the present author to substantiate this. Subscriptions were also invited, and from the Charity's Account Book it can be seen that the list included Lady Ashburton - 5 guineas, the Rev. John Rendle of Withycombe - 2 guineas and twenty others. In all £17.12s 8d was raised. The Rev. John Rendle was a regular subscriber and Mary Stanbrook says 'that he was mainly responsible for the organizing of the Charity'⁸. Mary Stanbrook also says that, 'there is a note that the sum of 40s per annum, given by William Culling in 1722 was appropriated by the Charity a hundred years later'⁹.

However, the earliest indentures relating to this Trust that have been located are the Indentures of 1814 and 1842¹⁰. Although these are of a later date, they are very similar in wording and substantiate much of what Mary Stanbrook says. Perhaps there was an Indenture of 1796, or the one of 1814 formalized the Trust, or perhaps these were drawn up when there was a change of Trustees. It is clear however that with the interest from this trust fund, together with the subscriptions, the Widecombe & Dartmoor Schools Charity was formed and it was this Charity that helped finance all the schools in the Parish of Widecombe with the exception of Leusdon and also, in the main, Dunstone (see below). Much of this is

⁷ Stanbrook, page 68

⁸ *ibid.* page 68

⁹ *ibid.* page 68

¹⁰ Indenture of 1814

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documented in the Account Book and the Indentures of 1814 and 1842. The pertinent points have been extracted from these two Indentures in the following:

The 1814 Indenture is similar to that described by Mary Stanbrook and is between John White of Ashburton & Clerk Aaron Neck of the one part and the Right Honourable John Lord Ashburton, John Pollexfen Bastard, Robert Sanders, John Rendle, John Caunter, Peter Fabyan, John Hannaford & James Hamlyn of the other part. It states that they are now in the possession of £142 vested in 5% as trustees, and a trust was set up for the purposes of paying all expenses incurred by the schoolmasters/schoolmistresses for the education of the poor of the parish. A letter dated 13th July 1821 from the Rev. J H Mason, the then vicar of Widecombe, to the Charity Commission, substantiates this¹¹.

The 1842 Indenture is part of a collection of documents & letters, collected by the Rev Williams, vicar of Widecombe (after the death of Rev Carlyon) and sent to the Commissioners of Charities trying to determine ownership of money left by the Charity after the death of all its Trustees. It mentions much the same as the 1814 indenture with regards to the beneficiaries but additionally states that 'the Schoolmaster/mistress shall reside or keep houses open for the reception of scholars in or near the villages of Widecombe Town, Ponsworthy, Hannaford, Hexworthy* & Merripit* or such other convenient place or places as the said Trustees for the time being or the majority from time to time think proper'. It is clear that this was acted upon, as will be seen. It is from this time that the Charity appears to be referred to as "the Schools Charity".

School Finances:

The School Finances are covered by the entries in the Widecombe & Dartmoor Charities Account Book. It shows that the schools were financed in a number of ways.

- 1) The interest from the money put in trust as described in the two indentures went towards the Widecombe & Dartmoor Schools Charity.
- 2) Money was raised by subscription, mainly of a guinea a year.
- 3) Donations, small and some not so small (there were donations from the Prince of Wales in 1843 - £10 and 1853 - £5.00).
- 4) Bequests (£50 from the Rev Mason)¹²
- 5) The church collections also contributed to their finances.
- 6) For those children whose parents could afford it, the children paid 'pence' for attending school.

This money raised each year by the Widecombe & Dartmoor Schools Charity paid for the teachers, extra was paid to them for teaching at Sunday School and also for those children described as knitters (entries in the Account Book show 'adjustment for knitters'), and it also paid for books needed to teach the children.

Interesting to note that a letter dated October 18th 1867, from the Manager of Widecombe National School to the Charity Commission, says that between 30 – 40

¹¹ Letter 13th July 1821

¹² Stanbrook, page 68, ED49-1615 letter dated March 19th 1868

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'children boys & girls attend daily' but that the School only gets £7.00 per annum which pays for 15 boys at 2 pence per week.¹³ This could be the impetus for change, since from about 1867, after Widecombe School becomes a National School, certain differences appear in the Accounts.

- 'Pence' start to appear in the accounts (amounting to £6.4s.7d for 1870) when presumably the school began to take in not just poor children, but children of parents who could afford to pay for their children to be educated.
- Rent of £5 for the schoolroom is being paid annually and this also shows up as a receipt in the Churchwardens Accounts¹⁴.
- Higher rate of pay for teachers (almost four times as much – see Teachers below).

The Premises:

The Account Book shows the whereabouts of the schools and this is confirmed by various enquiries. The Enquiry of 1831 mentions the schools of Dunstone, Ponsworthy and Poundsgate. The Enquiry of 1846-7 mentions Ponsworthy, Poundsgate, and Widecombe Town but no mention of Dunstone is made. However this latter Enquiry does state that other children are taught at these schools who are paid for by parents and are not included in the return.

The 1842 Indenture mentions that 'houses should be kept open for scholars in or near the Villages of Widecombe Town, Ponsworthy, Hannaford, Hexworthy* and Merripit*'.

Ponsworthy: The Account Book shows that in 1833 a Grace Warren taught nineteen children and Mary Stanbrook¹⁵ says this was at her Fernhill cottage until 1843 when she was succeeded by Avis Easterbrook, also at Fernhill. Fernhill is a small group of cottages, just up from the Splash on the road that leads from Ponsworthy to the Dartmeet road. The last known teacher in Ponsworthy was a Martha Withecombe. She taught until Lady's Day in 1858 and at that time she taught only six children. After this there is no more mention of Ponsworthy School in the Account Book and one can assume that it closed. It is probable that the children from this school would then have attended Leusdon School which was less than a mile away (see below).

Poundsgate: Hannaford was mentioned in the Account Book initially, but by 1833 Poundsgate only is mentioned, which is close to Hannaford. The Account Book shows that in 1833 Eliz' Hannaford taught fifteen children. Where exactly is not known and she was still teaching there in 1858 when she only had five pupils. This is the last entry for Poundsgate and much like Ponsworthy School it is assumed that it closed and that the children from this school would then have attended Leusdon School.

Dunstone: The exact whereabouts of this school is not documented until 1833, when a new building was erected with a separate room at Lower Dunstone and

¹³ ED49-1615, letter dated October 18th 1867

¹⁴ Churchwardens Accounts, year 1867-8 and 1868-9

¹⁵ Stanbrook, page 70

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this is still known today as the Schoolhouse. According to Mary Stanbrook, in 1824 the School in Venton moved to Dunstone and prior to that a cripple, John Norrish and his wife Nanny taught in a cottage in Dunstone¹⁶, so perhaps this is when the school started. Dunstone was first documented in the Account Book in 1817 when John Norrish was paid three shillings for teaching two children.

The Enquiry of 1833 states that Widecombe in the Moor had four daily schools, one of which commenced in 1833. This was the date the school at Dunstone was built. This Enquiry also noted that '16 boys & 4 girls' were instructed at Dunstone, which is the same number of children as in the Account Book. So it is probable that this is the Dunstone that is referred to. The Enquiry also states that they were instructed at the expense of their parents. But the Account Book still shows that Dunstone received books and that the teacher was paid for by the Charity up to the period 1837. Perhaps Dunstone School took both fee paying and poor children that were supported by the Charity, but this is not clear. Then on the 10th January 1837 it states 'To Martha Cleave (Widecombe Town) the old books given up at Dunstone School'. The last entry in the Account Book for Dunstone is a payment to Cath Harvey on January 4th 1837 for £1.2s.6d for teaching fourteen children. After this there are no further entries for Dunstone until 1854. Instead, Widecombe appears in the Account Book for a similar number of children.

The Enquiry of 1846-7 does not mention Dunstone School, but it does state that some children are taught at these Charity Schools who are paid for by parents and as such are not included in the return. This does not preclude there still being a school at Dunstone but that it perhaps only had fee-paying children. Also the census of 1851 lists a John Langdon, schoolmaster living at Dunstone.

Later, Dunstone School is again supported by the Charity when, in March of 1854, the Account Book says 'Widecombe Town School removed to Dunstone' and the entries for Widecombe School stop after the account to Lady's Day for ten children. From then on until the end of 1866 the Account Book shows regular entries for Dunstone both as payment for the Teachers, a Mr & Mrs Langdon, and for books etc. The last entry on 28th December 1866 to M Langdon for Dunstone shows a payment of £1.13s, but unfortunately it does not say for how many children.

A letter dated March 19th 1868, responding to the Charity Commissioners enquiry into which schools in the Parish of Widecombe receive aid from the Charity, says that in February 1867 the Dunstone School was removed to the Village.¹⁷ After this date it is uncertain what happened to Dunstone School.

Widecombe Town School: (later known as Widecombe School, and later still Widecombe National School.)

For the period that we are interested in – 1833-1870, there are entries for Widecombe Town School in the Account Book from 1835. There is only a single entry in the Account Book that mentions Widecombe Church House and that is in 1807, and this is the likely location of a School in Widecombe Town in 1835. It is worth noting that the Account Book does not show entries for a school in

¹⁶ Stanbrook, page 71-72

¹⁷ ED49-1615, letter dated 19th March 1868

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Widecombe Town continuously from 1797 when it shows it only had two scholars. The schoolroom is thought to have been situated upstairs in the Church House, with the ground floor rooms used as Poor House tenements. The upstairs, which was divided, had a school room and later separate accommodation for the teacher.¹⁸

The entry for 1837 in the Account Book stating that 'To Martha Cleave, old books given up at Dunstone School to Widecombe Town', confirms that by 1837 there was a school. Entries continue until 1854 when the Account book states that Widecombe Town School was removed to Lower Dunstone (Dunstone School).

At this juncture it is important to note that in 1864 the Ecclesiastical Parish of Widecombe was divided and the new Parish of Leusdon formed. By 1867 the Vicar and Churchwardens of Widecombe were seeking to retire from being Trustees of the National School at Leusdon, allowing Leusdon's Vicar, Churchwardens & Incumbents, to take on this role.¹⁹ The National School at Leusdon covered the education of all children living in the southern part of the Widecombe Parish and it seems that at this point the Vicar & Churchwardens of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Widecombe were seeking to establish a main school in their Parish - in what had been the northern part of the old Parish.

In a letter dated October 1868 from the then vicar of the Parish of Widecombe, written to the Dartmoor & Widecombe Charity Subscribers, he says that he is trying to raise more money²⁰. The maintenance of a School in his own Parish has been suddenly thrown upon him, and he is under the necessity of giving his own Subscription, and soliciting from owners and occupiers of land in Widecombe, separate and distinct support for the School near his Church (Widecombe School) which he is anxious to re-open without delay.

During the years 1867, 1868, and 1869 the Account Book shows that considerable monies were spent on refurbishment of the schoolroom (or rooms) at Widecombe School. For instance, there are payments of £1 for laths for the ceiling and £2.2.10 for other work done. Later in the year 1867, there is a payment for a 'new school room £5'. Does this mean that there were two schoolrooms? More work was done to the school the following year when 3s 6d was paid for whitewashing, and £8 13s 1d was paid for carpentry work done at the schoolroom in 1869 – a substantial sum. For the first time in 1867 the Account Book shows that rent of £5 for the schoolroom is being paid annually and this also shows up in the Churchwardens Accounts as a receipt²¹.

Widecombe School: While all this work was being done, Widecombe Town School reopened in 1867 under the name of Widecombe School and it is mentioned as such in both the Account Book and by the Rev P Carlyon in his letter to Subscribers to the Charity²². No longer does this School just cover Widecombe Town but the

¹⁸ National Trust leaflet on the Church House Widecombe

¹⁹ ED49-1615 letter, April 1st 1870

²⁰ Letter dated October 1868 from the Rev P Carlyon

²¹ Churchwardens Accounts, year 1867-8 and 1868-9

²² Letter from Rev. Carlyon with Accounts to Subscribers dated October 1868

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whole of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Widecombe (as previously mentioned the old Ecclesiastical Parish of Widecombe was now divided between Widecombe & Leusdon.) In February 1867 the School at Dunstone was removed to Widecombe²³ and by March 19th 1868 there is only Widecombe School and one or two others, in the Forest of Dartmoor, supported by the Charity²⁴. Widecombe is definitely the main school for the Parish and the School Manager in a letter dated October 1869, says that between 30 to 40 children, boys & girls, attend daily.²⁵

By the end of 1868 a Miss Webb appears in the Accounts for Widecombe and it is at this time that Widecombe probably became a National School. Previously teachers had been paid about £1.15s per quarter year but Miss Webb is paid a substantial amount and we can only assume that she is a certificated teacher. This is confirmed in the letter dated March 19th 1868 to the Charity Commission, saying that Widecombe is a National School having a certificated Master (in this case a Mistress).

In May 1875 the Account Book records that Widecombe School became a Board School and it remained at the Church House into the 20th Century.

Admission Criteria:

From the Widecombe & Dartmoor Charity Account Book, which runs from its inception in 1796, we learn in the first few pages of the Rules of the Charity. The first six rules cover the Admission Criteria, the rest have been included to give a complete record and are of interest.

- 1) 'That no child be admitted to this Charity whose parents can afford to pay for their instruction
- 2) That none be admitted under the age of four years.
- 3) That each child be entitled to 3 years instruction
- 4) That each child at his or her dismissal from school shall be presented with a Bible & some Religious Book
- 5) That the children after their dismissal if within a convenient distance shall attend the Sunday School & be examined from time to time by the Minister.
- 6) That this Charity be extended to all poor children resident in Withycombe or in the Forest of Dartmoor whether belonging to the parish or not.
- 7) That there shall be a meeting of Farmers & any other person who chouse [sic] to attend in the parish chamber on some day every year between the 1st March & Easter, when the annual account of the Charity for the year past shall be exhibited
- 8) And that this account be afterward shewn to each subscriber & then deposited in the parish chest.'

In the Account Book dated 1st April 1798, at a vestry meeting held at Withycombe an additional rule is listed

²³ ED49-1615, letter dated March 19th 1868

²⁴ The Account Book 1868

²⁵ ED49-1615, letter dated October 18th 1869

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- 9) 'That there be always the same number of schools as at present at or near the following places: Withycombe Town, Ponsworthy, Hannaford, Hexworthy* & Merripit*

The Admission Criteria are also partly covered by the 1814 Indenture and the 1842 Indenture (see Foundation & Governance) but these do differ slightly with regard to the age of the children. Both Indentures say children should be not less than 5 and not more than 12.

Also of interest are the censuses of 1851 and 1861 where children are described as scholars as young as 2 and as old as 16 (but not as being educated at home). Perhaps this can be explained away by the younger children being at school in a child-care capacity and the older children being sent away to secondary education off the moor. Or perhaps this rule was not carefully adhered to.

The Curriculum and the School day:

It seems clear that reading and writing were on the curriculum. This is substantiated by:

- The 1814 Indenture says that the boys & girls be educated in reading.
- A letter dated July 13th 1821, from the Rev J H Mason to the Charities Commissioners, Tiverton, states that the boys were taught to read and the girls to read, knit and sew²⁶.
- The Enquiry of 1846-7²⁷, describes Ponsworthy, Poundsgate, Hexworthy*, Postbridge* and Widecombe Town as Dame Schools – and therefore the rudiments of reading and writing would be taught.

The Account Book shows the books that were purchased for the Charity Schools between 1833 & 1870 and this clearly shows what was taught in the curriculum and that it was very much dominated by religious instruction.

- Testaments
- Bibles
- Psalters
- Spelling Books
- Childs first books
- Watts Hymns
- Spelling books
- Reading made easy
- Prayer books
- Sinclair's text to the Testaments
- Bible Questions to the scholars
- New Testaments
- Copy books
- Watts Moral songs
- Universal Spelling books

²⁶ Letter dated July 13th 1821 from Rev J H Mason

²⁷ Enquiry of 1846-7

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- Child Instructor
- Church Catechism – exercises for children
- Collects

The only purchases that stand out as a little different from those above are for the School at Dartmeet* in 1850 of 'Outlines of Geography' & 'Elements of Geography' and the purchase of four maps, two of which are the 'Eastern to Western Hemisphere' & one of the Christian Empire; also Arithmetic Tables for a school at Brimpts* in 1858. This shows that it is quite possible that subjects other than reading, writing and religious knowledge might have been taught at some of the schools, depending on the interest and ability of the teachers.

No precise documentation has come to light as to exactly how the School day was organized. It is only through the Account Book that we know what was taught and it can also be seen that it is not always the same at each individual school.

There is a very brief description of a day at one of the Hedge Schools in Widecombe, from Robert Dymond who says, 'he was Diocesan Inspector of Schools for the District in which Widecombe was', and went to Widecombe and inspected four 'hedge schools'²⁸, From what is said this would seem to be about 1852. Prior to this Dymond says that his predecessor in office said that he had never been allowed to visit the Widecombe Schools. Seemingly Dymond knew the Rev Mason, then vicar of Widecombe, and he made it possible for Dymond to inspect the schools in Widecombe. He does not say much about what he found, but says, "The first of three or four hedge schools to which I went, was kept by an old dame, with a poor crippled son sitting in the chimney corner. She looked at me grimly, and to my enquiry, put as blandly as possible, "What have the children been reading?" answered abruptly, 'Revelations; we begins at the beginning, and goes to the end.'" Perhaps she didn't like being inspected because the Account Book certainly reveals more was taught, from the many different religious books that were purchased.

The Teachers:

The teachers of these Dame schools, during the period 1833 – 1870 were mainly women, as is shown from the Account Book, and there is no mention of them being trained. However at Dunstone School, a John Langdon and his sister taught and it is interesting to note that in the census of 1851 John Langdon describes himself as a Schoolmaster and in the 1861 census both John Langdon and his sister Mary describe themselves as Schoolmaster and Schoolmistress. The teacher Martha Cleave who taught at Widecombe School also describes herself as a Schoolmistress in the 1841 census, and as a retired Schoolmistress in the 1851 census, but there does not appear to be anyone else in those censuses who describes themselves as Teachers. This does not mean of course that they were certificated teachers. However, by the end of 1868 a Mistress Webb is teaching at Widecombe School, and from the amount she is paid it would appear that she is a certificated Schoolmistress as would be required for a National School (see below).

²⁸ Robert Dymond's book, chapter - Reminiscences of Widecombe between 30 & 40 years ago.

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The amounts the teachers received at these Dame Schools between 1833 and 1854 does not appear to vary much. In the Account Book for 1833 there are the following payments to teachers (the initial number is the number of pupils):

	Ponsworthy		Dunstone		Poundsgate	
to Lady Day	19	£1.10s	20	£1.12s	15	£1.4s.6d
to Mid Summer	18	£1.9s	20	£1.10s.6d	16	£1.6s.6d
to Michaelmas	18	£1.9s	23	£1.15s	15	£1.4s.6d
to Xmas	19	£1.10s.6d	22	£1.15s	15	£1.5s

By 1854 the rate of pay had not changed:

to Lady Day	18	£1.9s			17	£1.7s.6d
to Mid Summer	14	£1.3s	12	£1	17	£1.7s.6d
to Michaelmas	17	£1.3s.4d	12	£1	17	£1.8s.6d
to Xmas	16	£1.3s.10d	11	£0.16s.6d	17	£1.7s.6d

By 1866 the Account Book no longer shows the number of pupils against payment so a comparison cannot be made. The Account Book also says in several places, 'adjustment for knitters' which might explain variations in the payments.

A letter to the Charity Commission²⁹ mentions that in 1868 each Charity School received £7 from the Widecombe & Dartmoor Schools Charity, which equates to £1.12s.6d a quarter, and which corresponds, allowing for adjustments for knitters etc, to what is seen in the Account Book.

By the end of 1868 there appears to have been a major change to the school at Widecombe and by this date it was a National School³⁰. At this time a Miss Webb is teaching at Widecombe and she is paid £3.10s per quarter until the end of 1869 when she is being paid £6.5s. She continues to be the Mistress into the 1870s. This is a substantial amount and from this it can be assumed that she is a certificated teacher.

In today's money, the relative worth of one pound in 1850 equates to £737 using a table that computes the relative value using average earnings.³¹

Leusdon School: also later known as The National School of Widecombe in the Moor & later still Leusdon National School

Foundation & Governance: Leusdon School was built on an acre of land on Leusdon Common, which was granted by the Reverend Thomas Fry, the then Lord of the Manor of Spitchwick, and conveyed by a deed dated 20th June 1855 (under the authority of an Act to afford further facilities for the conveyance and endowment of sites for schools, and an act passed in the eighth year of Queen

²⁹ Letter dated March 19th 1868

³⁰ Letter dated March 19th 1868, final page

³¹ www.measuringworth.com – average earnings

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Victoria) to the Vicar and Churchwardens of Widecombe for the purpose of a school.³² The Vicar and Churchwardens would act as Trustees.

The school continued under these Trustees, the Vicar and Churchwardens of Widecombe Parish, until in 1864 the Ecclesiastical Parish of Widecombe was divided and the new Parish of Leusdon formed. By 1867 the Vicar and Churchwardens of the now separate Widecombe Parish were seeking to retire from being Trustees, of the National School at Leusdon, since the School was no longer in their Parish. This was finally granted on 11th November 1870 allowing Leusdon's Incumbents & Churchwardens to take on this role.³³ During the transitional stage, the new Trustees were encouraged to adopt a more definite scheme of management by the Charity Commission, than that adopted by the Indenture of 1855³⁴. The School, initially known as Leusdon School, became or was a National School (when is not known) but was referred to in correspondence with the Charity Commission as 'The National School, Widecombe in the Moor'³⁵. This obviously was confusing when Widecombe School became a National School and it was suggested by the Rev Williams in a letter to the Charity Commission that the name be changed to the Leusdon National School, since it was now in the Ecclesiastical Parish of Leusdon and that the Trusteeship had been transferred to the Incumbents & Churchwardens of Leusdon. The letter goes on to say that the School should be of benefit only to the inhabitants of that district. The National School at Leusdon covered the education of all that had been the southern part of the Widecombe Parish and was now completely separate from the Ecclesiastical Parish of Widecombe, the two churches being some 3-4 miles apart.

Finances:

This southern area of the Parish of Widecombe was described as a neglected part of the Parish of Widecombe with regards to schools and a Mrs Charlotte Rosamond Larpent of Torquay, at her sole expense, paid for the building of the school, the salaries and the running expenses. She also subsequently built a teacher's residence with two rooms put aside for her own use. It had at least two classrooms, one for the first class and one or maybe two for the upper classes, and a playground. She later paid for the building of a church and a vicarage at Leusdon.

When Leusdon became a National School (the date of which has not been ascertained), it was in receipt of an annual grant dependent on the results of Inspection by one of her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools.³⁶ How much is not known.

Premises:

This has been covered in the Foundation and Governance

³² ED49-1615 letter of 30th April 1868

³³ ED49-1615 Notice of Order by the Charity Commission November 11th 1870

³⁴ ED49-1615 letter, April 1st 1870

³⁵ ED49-1615 letter, June 18th 1870

³⁶ ED49-1615 letter June 18th 1870

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Admission Criteria:

A letter dated December 17th 1869 in answer to a Charity Commission Enquiry mentions that 'it was a school for the education of children (and adults) of the poorer classes'. This fact is interesting as it is the first time that the education of adults is mentioned.³⁷ Although it does not appear that Leusdon is supported by the Widecombe & Dartmoor Schools Charities there is an entry in the Widecombe & Dartmoor Charities Accounts for 1855 that says 'Mrs Larpent recently erected a School in the Spitchwick Quarter³⁸ in May last as a mixed school for Boys & Girls, and all parents are requested, who wish to send their children to pay a penny a week, without writing and two pence including writing and to make it known to Mr Dobell the Schoolmaster.'

The School Day:

From the School Log Book of 1865 to 1880³⁹ (an earlier one is not available) a lot can be learnt about the school and one gets a feel for the life of an elementary village school in Dartmoor. Unlike the Widecombe & Dartmoor Schools Charity Account Book, which merely states what books were used, hearing about the day to day running of the school makes life at Leusdon School come alive. The School Log Book reads like a weather report. Every day the weather is mentioned explaining the huge variance in the number of children attending: 'January 16th 1866 wet morning no children, in the afternoon 7'. Gradually the numbers increased until on 'January 21st 1866, 44 children'. On December 4th, 5th, & 6th 1867 the snow was very deep, only 5 children attended then 6 on the later two days.

Cold also was a problem in the school and on January 7th 1867 it states 'Marching for a quarter hour to get warm'. Probably to try and combat absenteeism it says that on February 17th 1868 'Mrs Larpent came and gave some cloaks away to the children'. The other extreme weather also affected the children – July 27th 1868 – 'children useless during the afternoon owing to the heat'.

The weather wasn't the only thing that prevented the children from attending school and 'attendance small' was noted for the following:

- April 4th 1867, assisting parents with planting potatoes
- June 27th & 28th 1867, children with their parents gathering Whortleberries
- July 8th & 12th 1867 haymaking
- March 27th 1868, dropping potatoes and so on

Funerals, a Sale in Leusdon, all meant children were off school and of course there were children who were off sick. But the children were given a day off for a Choral Festival in Ashburton, as they were for religious festivals, and they had a month off in August.

Punishment is mentioned in the Log Book, but not often. Lying or being rude meant standing in the corner or staying in at playtime.

³⁷ ED49-1615 letter of 17th December 1869

³⁸ Leusdon lies within the Manor of Spitchwick, in the civil Parish of Widecombe in the Moor

³⁹ School Log Book

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Certainly there was a leniency and understanding for children taking time off to help at home or on the farm. But to try to encourage more attendances, at the end of the school year in 1868 Mrs Larpent gave prizes of one shilling to those children who had attended more than 300 times during the past year and 6 pence to those children that had attended 200 times.

School treats were also mentioned

- January 8th 1866 - school treat (60 children attended)
- June 1867 - tea at the parsonage
- July 25th 1867 - children allowed to pick & eat fruit in the garden
- new games taught during dinner hour
- three children went blackberrying during playtime

There was also a playhouse in which the boys ate their dinner during wet weather. In the winter of 1868, perhaps because of the weather, it was decided to give up playtime in winter altogether. Another treat mentioned, probably as a treat for Christmas on December 7th 1868, a Miss Kindersly and a Miss Lorraine distributed figs and money.

The School Curriculum:

This is not as clear as with the Charity Schools as School Accounts are not available. But apart from reading and writing⁴⁰, which we know from the Charities Account Book, the School Log Book for the years 1866 to 1868 mentions the following lessons: Scripture, the reading of Prayers, Catechism, learning Hymns, Singing, Dictation, Letter Writing, Geography, Arithmetic, Mental Arithmetic, Times Tables, Needlework, lesson on 'animal', object lesson to infant class, first class taught rule in money. A daily routine was mentioned but unfortunately not expanded upon.

Teachers:

It would appear from the log book that the benefactress, Mrs Larpent, initially came in at least once a week to take classes, along with other teachers, but it is said that she became more and more interested in her work at Leusdon (and presumably came in more often), residing more often at Leusdon and in fact adding two rooms to the School House for her own use⁴¹. Various vicars are mentioned as visiting the school and taking classes, including the Leusdon vicar, as well as various schoolmasters & schoolmistresses.

The School is regularly inspected and at the end of the school year there is an Examination Day, after which Mrs Larpent writes an annual report on the school. On October 8th 1866 it is reported that a Mr Thornton, a Diocesan Inspector, examined the School, but unfortunately does not say what he found.

⁴⁰ The Account Book 1853

⁴¹ ED49 – 1615 letter of 1st August 1867

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Summary:

From this report it can be seen that there are two main events that affected and changed education in the Parish of Widecombe: initially the formation of the Widecombe and Dartmoor Schools Charity, and subsequently the interest a very rich widow, Mrs Larpent, took in the education of the southern part of the Parish by paying for the building of a school in Leusdon, a teacher's residence, and a church, together with a vicarage. This led to the Parish being divided ecclesiastically and was, it is thought, the catalyst for a main school developing in the remaining north part of the Parish in Widecombe. This had the consequence that dame schools in the area surrounding these two schools died out.

The formation of the Charity has been dealt with fully in this report and shows that its formation, although much earlier - in 1797 - than the period we are interested in, encouraged financially the setting up of dame schools and brought a certain amount of regulation and control to what before must have been a fairly random activity and dependent much on the willingness and availability of women who were interested in teaching from home. It also meant that education was free to those who could not afford it and allowed many more children to be educated. By the 1830s there were a core number of dame schools covering the area mentioned in the Rules of the Charity and the Indentures.

In 1853 along came a change that would affect the whole of the Parish of Widecombe, the formation of Leusdon School, although this was not apparent at the time. This well endowed school, built and seemingly run by Mrs Larpent, was the flagship of the Parish. It was, as mentioned in this report, referred to as the National School, Widecombe-in-the-Moor by the Charity Commission. But the ecclesiastical division of the Parish in 1864, meant the main school was now outside the ecclesiastical Parish of Widecombe and this surely must have caused ructions within the community. Indeed, even today there is a certain division, a competitiveness, between the community living in Leusdon and the community in Widecombe. It is little wonder that Widecombe Diocese instructed the vicar to attend to the maintenance of a school in his own Parish and this did indeed happen; Widecombe's school was vastly improved, a qualified teacher was employed, and it became a National School with all that that entailed, inspection and otherwise.

So, by the end of the period that the report covers - 1870, the geographical Parish of Widecombe as we know it today had two National Schools. Both continued as such until in 1875 when Widecombe School became a Board School. In 1879 Mrs Larpent died and in 1880 Widecombe School Board took over Leusdon School. In 1932 Widecombe School moved from the Church House to newly built premises a short distance away. Leusdon School closed in 1937 and this left Widecombe School as the only school in Widecombe Parish, which is still the case today.

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