

# *This is A Few Forgotten Women Story*



*This story was written, in September 2024, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of pupils at the Royal Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Poor (later The Royal School for the Deaf), Margate, Kent and The West of England Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Exeter, Devon.*

## **Catharine Oliver's Story**

The Annual Reports for the West of England School for the Deaf record Catharine Oliver of Charlton Marshall, 'Somerset', as being a pupil between 1837-1846.<sup>1</sup> In fact Charlton Marshall is, and was, definitely in Dorset<sup>2</sup> - then in the Blandford district of Dorset - now in North Dorset<sup>3</sup>. Most likely 'Somerset' was a simple mistake, confused by a clerk in Devon with the many places in Somerset named 'Charlton'. Catharine's baptism appears in the Affpuddle register<sup>4</sup> on 18 October 1829, when her parents John (a labourer) and Mary Oliver (nee Cake) were living

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<sup>1</sup> Transcribed extracts from Annual Reports DHC 7645C West of England School for the Deaf and Dumb Annual Reports, 1826-1860 accessed July 2024 with kind permission from Devon Archives and Local Studies, and from the Deaf Academy, Exmouth

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.opcdorset.org/CharltonMarshallFiles/CharltonMarshall.htm>

<sup>3</sup> GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, History of Charlton Marshall, Dorset | Map and description, A *Vision of Britain through Time*. <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/place/13597> Accessed: 20th October 2024

<sup>4</sup> Baptism register for the parish of Affpuddle (Dorset History Centre) - accessed via ancestry.co.uk

in the farming hamlet of Briantspuddle. They had been married in their then parish of residence, Tolpuddle, on 10 October 1821<sup>5</sup>.

Catharine (Catherine in some records) had elder siblings including Charles, baptised 31 March 1822 at Affpuddle, and Phillis, baptised 18 March 1824 at Affpuddle. However it appears that her father John Oliver did not have legal settlement in that parish and, whether due to incapacity or economic circumstances, a lack of agricultural work and inability to support his family led to the Charlton Marshall Parish Overseers of the Poor accepting a removal order to Charlton Marshall (a few miles south of Blandford on the main road towards Poole) for “John Oliver, labourer, Mary his wife and Charles aged ten, Phillis aged eight, Catharine aged two their children, from Affpuddle. 31 Mar 1832”<sup>6</sup> Mary must have been pregnant at the time as another son, Robert, was baptised at Blandford Forum on 6 June 1832. Further younger siblings for Catharine were born at Charlton Marshall - Dinah baptised 25 Sep 1836 (but died aged just 5 and buried at Charlton Marshall 31 March 1842) and William, born in 1838 and baptised 13 January 1839.<sup>7</sup>

Because the Oliver family had been accepted by Charlton Marshall parish, it would then have been that parish’s responsibility to support the family or to find ways such as education or apprenticeships to enable them to support themselves (and save the parish money) in future. However, attitudes to education for all in such a rural community would have also been influential.

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<sup>5</sup> Marriage register for the parish of Tolpuddle (Dorset History Centre) accessed via ancestry.co.uk - Dorset, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1813-1921

<sup>6</sup> Dorset Archives Catalogue <https://archive-catalogue.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/records/PC-CHM/5/3/3/9>

<sup>7</sup> Baptism and Burial registers for Charlton Marshall (Dorset History Centre) - accessed via ancestry.co.uk - Dorset, England, Church of England Deaths and Burials, 1813-2010

Catharine's younger brother was fortunate that Thomas, the son and heir of the local landowner (Thomas Horlock Bastard 1772-1849)<sup>8</sup>, was a forward-thinking and active philanthropist - illustrated by a later newspaper report<sup>9</sup> of the building in 1855 of a club-house with newspapers and periodicals, together with a bakery and shop supplying at near cost prices to provide for the physical comfort as well as the intellectual recreation of artisans and labourers, both male and female, in Charlton Marshall. However, Catharine Oliver would have had to be recommended to the Deaf and Dumb Institution by the local rector or vicar, so the attitudes of local clergy would have been an important factor for her and the Rector of Spetisbury and Charlton Marshall from 1780 to 1840 was the Rev Thomas Rackett<sup>10</sup>. Although there were complaints about his inattention to routine parish duties, he was a forward-thinking polymath, with a wife and daughter who contributed to discussions as intellectual equals.<sup>11</sup>

So, in June 1841<sup>12</sup> Catharine Oliver, age 11, not born in Devon, was listed on the census as a Pupil at the Deaf and Dumb School, St Leonards, Exeter. During the nine or ten years Catharine spent at the school, the Ladies Committee Minutes<sup>13</sup> show that she would have spent her younger years "employed in household work and at [her] needles till 10 o'clock when ... required in the school room, and that from one till three [was] devoted to dinner and recreation". From the age of 12, she would have been "employed in all the departments of household

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<sup>8</sup> <https://landedfamilies.blogspot.com/2020/11/437-bastard-of-blandford-forum-and.html>

<sup>9</sup> Article from "The Builder" - in Huddersfield Chronicle 14 April 1855 accessed via British Newspaper Archive

<sup>10</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Rackett](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Rackett) and his correspondence published as The Thomas Rackett papers by the Dorset Record Society 1965

<sup>11</sup> Roger Guttridge - <https://www.theblackmorevale.co.uk/2022/06/20/a-right-religious-rackett-pt-1-looking-back/> Accessed 21 Oct 2024

<sup>12</sup> 1841 England Census HO107; Piece: 263; Book: 23; Civil Parish: St Leonard; County: Devon; Enumeration District: 7; Folio: 14; Page: 23; accessed via ancestry.co.uk

<sup>13</sup> The Minute Book of the Ladies Committee 1830-1859, DHC 7645C West of England School for the Deaf accessed July 2024 with kind permission from Devon Archives and Local Studies, and from the Deaf Academy, Exmouth - extracts transcribed by Helen Shields [Jan 21<sup>st</sup> 1833]

work and that 8 hours [was] considered sufficient ... in the school room". Both plain and fancy needlework was taught.

The rest of the Oliver family appears on the 1841 census in Charlton Marshall, Dorset. John and Mary<sup>14</sup> were with their children Charles, Robert, Dinah and William, while Catharine's sister Phillis<sup>15</sup> was also in Charlton Marshall but living as a servant in a farmer's household.

While Catharine was away at the Deaf and Dumb School in Exeter, her father John died and was buried on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1844<sup>16</sup> aged 50 at Charlton Marshall. The family must then have become even more impoverished and reliant on income from the children as well as charity but, although the Deaf and Dumb School's Annual Report for 1847<sup>17</sup> records that Catharine's occupation when she left was a 'Sempstress' (seamstress) no occupation is given for her on the 1851 census.<sup>18</sup> Catharine, age 22, was then living at home in Charlton Marshall with her widowed mother (a laundress) and brother William age 12, already a labourer. Catharine is simply described as "since birth Deaf and Dumb" and it is significant that her place of birth was given as Charlton Marshall, the parish to which she had been removed aged two with her parents and which, as her new place of settlement, would have supported her education in the Deaf and Dumb Institution at Exeter.

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<sup>14</sup> 1841 England Census - HO107; Piece: 287; Book: 7; Civil Parish: *Charlton Marshall*; County: *Dorset*; Enumeration District: 6; Folio: 3; Page: 1; accessed via [ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk)

<sup>15</sup> 1841 England Census - HO107; Piece: 287; Book: 7; Civil Parish: *Charlton Marshall*; County: *Dorset*; Enumeration District: 6; Folio: 11; Page: 16; accessed via [ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk)

<sup>16</sup> Burial register for the parish of Charlton Marshall, Dorset (Dorset History Centre) - accessed via [ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk)

<sup>17</sup> Annual Reports DHC 7645C West of England School for the Deaf and Dumb Annual Reports, 1826-1860 accessed July 2024 with kind permission from Devon Archives and Local Studies, and from the Deaf Academy, Exmouth

<sup>18</sup> 1851 Census Class: HO107; Piece: 1853; Folio: 204; Page: 22; accessed via [ancestry.co.uk](https://www.ancestry.co.uk) (surname mis-transcribed as 'Oliven').

Sadly, Catharine's life was short and the next record is of her death at the age of just 25. Catharine's death was registered in the June quarter of 1855<sup>19</sup> and her death certificate<sup>20</sup> states that she died of typhus fever at home, with her mother, in Charlton Marshall on 24th April. The entries in the Charlton Marshall burial register for the first few months of that year<sup>21</sup> unusually include several young people, suggesting they may have succumbed to the same infection which was then prevalent in Dorset and other poor areas of the country.

Catharine Oliver was buried on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1855.<sup>22</sup> The description on her death certificate places her back at the heart of a family who had suffered much hardship: "Daughter of Mary Oliver widow of John Oliver agricultural labourer".

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<sup>19</sup> England and Wales Deaths – Q Jun 1855 Blandford, Dorset, United Kingdom Vol 5a Page 195

<sup>20</sup> England and Wales Death Certificate GRO Digital Image - no 314 - 1855 Jun Blandford Vol 05A Page 195

<sup>21</sup> Burial register for the parish of Charlton Marshall, Dorset (Dorset History Centre) - accessed via [ancestry.co.uk](http://ancestry.co.uk)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.