

THROWLEIGH



The Story of a Dartmoor Village



By

EMMIE VARWELL



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DARTMOOR VILLAGE

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The Throwleigh Archive
Throwleigh, Devon

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Preface

Emma Varwell was born on the 9th June 1867, the second child of Emma and Peter Varwell of Brixham. In the 1871 census we find her, aged 3, in Brixham, with her mother Emma (42) and brother Peter. Perhaps her father Peter, Master of the *Little Dorrit*, and member of a long line of Brixham mariners, was at sea. His most illustrious ancestor was famous locally as the ‘little man’ who carried William of Orange ashore from his boat in 1688, and then escorted him and his soldiers to London, for a magnificent reward of £100.

Emma’s sister Elizabeth was born in 1873. At some time, Emma became Emmie, and more mysteriously, Elizabeth became known as Michael – Father Lowe’s grandson Theodore Landon told me that Anglo-Catholics believed that the names of angels could be used by men or women. In Emmie’s book about Throwleigh, she says almost nothing about herself or her family, except that the two sisters came to the village in 1909. In 1913, on the 17th October there are two interesting entries in the parish register of baptisms: Emma and Elizabeth were baptised, at the ages of 46 and 40, by Father Lowe. He has written ‘S. Ethelreda’ against both entries. I’ll leave scholars of hagiography to speculate on this.

According to Kelly’s directory, they were in Grey Cottage in 1914 and 1919; by 1923 they were living in Pease Close in Shilstone Lane. They must have lived there for at least seven years, but Jack Symons said they found it ‘too noisy’. Around 1930 they moved down the narrow lane to Wooda, where they spent the rest of their lives. There they were close to Father Lowe in Hollow Park (until he died in 1933), and a short walk across one of his fields took them to the Church, passing the memorial stone to his favourite dog

‘Rip’ as they entered the churchyard. Interviews in the Throwleigh Archive give us a few glimpses into their lives: servants, tea parties, selling the book at railway stations, and Emmie speaking French to the onion boys. Father Lowe had names for them: Emmie was ‘the fancy’ and Michael was ‘the useful’. Emmie died in 1952; her sister lived to be almost 100, dying in 1973.

Throwleigh was first printed in 1938 as a hardback by Sydney Lee of Exeter on good quality paper. It was later reprinted as a rather cheaper paperback, with one added footnote in the text and *Published by the Rector* at the foot of the title page. The reprint has fewer plates (and no map) and the photo of Father Drew was moved from near the back of the book to a more prominent position at the front.

When Emmie Varwell was writing her book, her memory of Father Lowe, whom she had known for many years, was still fresh, and through her we know so much about that remarkable man. She was also writing at a crucial time, when Throwleigh was still predominantly agricultural, still dependent on horses, and still retained its old families, some of whom had been there for centuries – Moore, Dunning, Hill, Brimblecombe, Aggett, Endacott, Gidley, Knapman, and Dicker. She has written a remarkable book, which is important as the only substantial published source for life in Throwleigh before 1938. She writes in an almost conversational style, where one topic leads to another, even if this disrupts any overall plan for the book. She also reveals a real interest in the lives of ordinary people, some with memories going back to the 19th century, and faithfully records what they actually said – as the Rural Dean wrote in 1938, *a little gem*.

Michael Paget
Woodacott
February 2017

“THROWLEIGH”

This is a little “gem” piecing together the known, the traditional and the unknown history of this charming place with its centre, its “Church Life.”

I hope it will have a very wide circulation and thus help forward the work of the Church.

I suppose I was asked to write this “foreword” because the Author knew I loved Throwleigh.

What has been done for the Church during the Incumbency of Father Lowe (how we loved him!) and is being done by Father Drew on the foundations laid for him is charmingly told in “Throwleigh.”

What a joy it must be to live in Throwleigh with its whole life radiating from the “Living Presence” within the Sanctuary of the Parish Church.

H. BEAUMONT F. BURNABY,
Rural Dean of Okehampton.

For help in finding information my thanks are due to more people than I can enumerate—but I must especially mention the late Mr. Charles A. T. Fursdon, Mr. John Northmore and Mr. Frank Osborne ; also Miss Ethel Lega Weekes, Miss Beatrice Cresswell and Mrs. Willoughby Lowe.

Also for very material help in lifting heavy stones at Wonson, which were in a most precarious position, I gratefully remember Mr. Edward Wonnacott, Mr. T. Coombe, Mr. Richard Hill, Mr. Cecil Powlesland and Mr. Fred Hill.

EMMIE VARWELL,

Wooda, Throwleigh, 1938.

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Emmie Varwell moved to Throwleigh in 1909. Soon her life became centred around the parish church and village in an area isolated by natural moorland and narrow lanes.

In 1938 she wrote this book, *'Throwleigh, The Story of a Dartmoor Village.'* In it she describes her love for the church, the landscape and the history of the surrounding area, with references from as far back as the Domesday Book. The lives of the village people that she had known and the stories that they had told her, both of the recent past and of long-ago are recorded. It describes a way of life that was soon to change forever.

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