

# Robert Raikes and the Beginning of the English Sunday School Movement

March 10, 2024

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## INTRODUCTION:

Robert Raikes (b. 9/14/1736; d. 4/5/1811);  
Gloucester, England

Robert, who received his father's name, was  
born into a well known and well off family.

This afforded him many opportunities which  
he did not fail to apply to the benefit of others

## I. FAMILY LIFE

- A) Young Robert, who was the eldest son amongst his siblings, inherited the prominent, "Gloucester Journal" from his father who passed away suddenly when young Robert was 21 years old.
- B) Married Anne Trigge, December 23, 1767. They would have 3 sons and 7 daughters.

## C) OTHER INFLUENCES

1. Baptized September 24, 1736 in St. Mary de Crypt Church
2. Attended St. Mary de Crypt Grammar School and College Cathedral School
3. His family was related by marriage to William Wilberforce
4. His parents were friends with Geo. Whitefield, John Wesley and Charles Wesley, and all 3 were frequently in their home while young Robert was growing up.

## II. RECOGNIZING THE NEED

- A) Robert's good friend John Howard was committed to attempting to reform the prison system. In 1773 Robert accompanied him on a visit to the local prison where he became appalled at the conditions.
- B) Robert began using his newspaper to publicize the state of the prison, to ask the public to provide aid and relief to the prisoners and to press for prison reform.
- C) He also used his personal wealth to attempt to reform former prisoners and prevent them from returning to prison. This was not very successful, so he shifted his focus to trying to train the children and prevent them from ever getting into the prison system.

## III. ORGANIZING THE SCHOOLS

- A) Robert believed the children needed training in literacy, morality and religion.
- B) He also believed that all three could be accomplished with the Bible as the primary source.
- C) He was aided by Parliament passing the "Enabling Act" in 1779 making it legal for anyone to open a school without having to subscribe to the rule of the Anglican Church.

D) First, he tried gathering a group of kids in the church courtyard and teaching them from the catechism.

E) Next, he hired Mrs. Meredith in Sooty Alley to teach a group of ~14 boys, but they were more than she could handle.

F) Then he hired Mrs. Critchley to start a 2<sup>nd</sup> school, soon all the students had been transferred to Mrs. Critchley because she was having more success.

1. She was a more capable teacher
2. Her school was near Raikes' home and St. Mary de Crypt Church.
3. Raikes was beginning to develop an understanding of what he wanted to see from the school and a method for accomplishing it.

G) Initially Raikes oversaw all aspects of the school personally, especially discipline. He even frequently tracked down the absent or walked home a student who had misbehaved, waited until the student was disciplined by his or her parents then walked them back to school.

H) The expectations were high with emphasis placed on:

1. Punctuality
2. Courtesy
3. Hygiene
4. Effort

## 5. School Schedule

- a. 10AM - Begin morning lessons
- b. 12 - 1 PM Lunch
- c. 1 - 4 PM Afternoon Lessons
- d. 4 PM Attend short service at nearby church
- e. 5:30 PM School dismissed and students strongly admonished to go straight home without stopping for any kind of mischief along the way.

I) At the same time allowances were made. For example, once Raikes asked a little girl why so few of her friends came. When she replied that none of them had nice clothes he asked her to tell them all that if they would wash their hands and faces and comb their hair he would be satisfied.

## J) CURRICULUM

1. Initially used the Bible & catechism to teach reading, writing & morals and discipline to enforce behavioral change.
2. Later Raikes would use his publishing house to produce multiple editions of multiple titles of his own creation to help the teachers and students be more successful.

#### IV. EFFECTS

- A) The 1<sup>st</sup> school was started in 1780. By 1783 people were noticing a change in the behavior of the children of Gloucester and the school model was spreading.
- B) In 1784 John Wesley described his experience at a school near Bingsley Church.
- C) In 1785 he described attending another one in Leeds. Where the town had been divided into 7 sections, there were 26 schools, 2000 students, 45 teachers and 4 "inquisitors" who took roll then tracked down any missing students.
- D) At about this same time Raikes estimated his original enrollment of 20 or so students had become an enrollment of 250,000.
- E) For the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Raikes' first school Lord Shaftesbury commissioned a statue of Raikes to commemorate him and his schools. At the unveiling of the statue Lord Shaftesbury estimated there were 1,250,000 students in schools patterned after Raikes' first one.

#### CONCLUSION:

Raikes set in motion what would become the English public school system, but more importantly millions of children and their families were exposed to the Bible. Raikes did seek social reform, but make no mistake he sought to bring it about by exposing children to the Gospel in the hope that their lives would reflect the Gospel and thus society would change.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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