

A Brief Look at a few Sunday School Medals (Part 1)

Most of the readers of this will be familiar with the medals produced in 1880 commemorating the centenary of Sunday Schools and bearing a portrait of Robert Raikes. A number of these make the claim that Raikes ‘founded Sunday Schools’. This is true in so far as he was in part responsible for the foundation of a number of such institutions in his home city of Gloucester.



Raikes had for some years been interested in the education of children using suitably adapted versions of the Bible and Catechism. He promoted his ideas in the pages of his newspaper, the *Gloucester Journal*, and, in 1783 published an editorial extolling the advantages to society of providing establishments on Sundays (the one day when most of them weren't working) where children could be taught to read and write (with the added advantage that it would help to keep them out of trouble!). To cut a long story short, the idea found universal favour and the **Sunday School Movement** was born. This was Robert Raikes legacy.

Most Sunday schools began as small scale affairs with children from the local community being taught in churches, rented rooms or even the homes of the teachers. Eventually purpose built Sunday schools began to appear and some of these, especially in the area of Manchester and North Cheshire, grew to be very impressive concerns indeed – and it is with the medals distributed within two of these establishments that the remainder of this article is concerned.

Dukinfield Old Chapel Sunday School

Dukinfield is now in Greater Manchester, located about 8 miles east of the city centre. Its commercial growth in the 19th century, based on cotton and coal, saw the population grow from 1,737 in 1801 to over 26,000 by 1851.

The Sunday school commenced on Sunday 10th August 1800 through the efforts of the then Minister, the Reverend James Hawkes, who persuaded his adult congregation to have their service in the afternoon in order that the children could be instructed in the morning. The success of the venture soon necessitated the construction of a dedicated building. Funds were raised in various ways

including a series of 'Charity Sermons' preached in the Old Chapel – even the children themselves subscribed a ½d per week. The new building was completed by the end of 1810 but the continued success and growth of the Sunday school movement required extensions to be made in 1820 and again in 1839.

(The Old Chapel building was itself virtually destroyed by a severe storm on 7th January 1839 and was subsequently rebuilt).

In 1850 the school celebrated its Golden Jubilee which saw the striking of the first medals associated with it.



I am unable to give much information about this item. It is not recorded in Brian Edge's book on Cheshire (although the other medals for the school mentioned below are). The size is not known. (I don't even have any recollection of where I obtained the photographs!). This specimen seems to be in white metal and the records show that four (or possibly six) silver specimens were also presented.

What is known is that "On the Saturday (25th May 1850) the Scholars met at the School at one o'clock and then adjourned to the Chapel where each was presented with a medal..... They then walked in precession through the village..... Returning to the School, they had a good tea with a liberal allowance of buns and cakes...."

The 1851 census records that there were 480 Scholars on the books of the school and by 1880 a further enlargement to the building was needed to accommodate some 690 scholars in 14 classes.

The next significant event to be commemorated in the life of the school was the Centenary in 1900 which was celebrated on Saturday 22nd September. "(The scholars) began to assemble at the Town Lane School soon after two o'clock. Each scholar was presented with a chaste aluminium medal commemorative of the

important event. On the face it bore a representation of the frontage of the old school in Town Lane and the side of the new school in Pickford Lane..... Between six and seven hundred of these mementoes were given out..”



45mm. Aluminium. By Fenwick. Edge: CM63 (Incorrectly listed as White Metal)



The same view of the school in an early 20th century photograph

Dukinfield Sunday school, like so many others, rewarded the persistent attendance and punctuality of its scholars with the presentation of medals – and Dukinfield’s is a particularly attractive one.



51mm. Unsigned. Edge: R21

William Swindells, the recipient of this particular 'Medal of Honour' in 1882, was 16 or 17 at the time – quite mature for a Sunday school scholar one might think. However it must be borne in mind that many of the larger Sunday Schools also ran classes for adults and, in any event, the Swindells family had a long and close association with the school. A Betty Swindells was teaching there in 1839; at the 1900 reunion William (of course), John (William's older brother), and Sarah (William's wife) were all present along with other members of the family. William's son – also William – is listed as one of the school's superintendents in 1950.

The building eventually also housed a local authority day school and after this moved to new premises in 1985 the reduced requirement for Sunday school provision in modern society saw the site redeveloped shortly afterwards. A new School Hall was, however, built in the Chapel yard opening in 1987 and from there the Sunday school was able to celebrate its bicentenary in 2000.

Bennett Street Sunday School, Manchester.

Bennett Street (now 'Bendix' Street to avoid local duplication of the name) is located in what was the New Cross area of central Manchester.

'St.Paul's Bennett Street Sunday School, Manchester, was founded in 1801 by David Stott and moved to its site in Bennett Street, New Cross in 1818.' So we are informed in M.W.Lees history of the school. There does not however, in any source, seem to be evidence to support this very specific contention. Nevertheless there is no doubt that David Stott and his father, Thomas, played a

major role in the operation of the half a dozen schools attached to St. Paul's church. In 1805 the Primrose Street school where David Stott was in charge had some 350 scholars; by 1808 the school was obliged to move with its 726 scholars to new (actually rather old) premises in George Leigh Street as the largest Church of England Sunday school in Manchester. By 1810 Stott's efforts had grown the number to 1,526 and by 1810 there were 1,905 scholars serviced by a staff of 40.

The expanding school clearly needed new premises and in February 1815 a fund was commenced with that goal in view. Scholars and teachers all contributed and soon local businesses were involved in the project. The total cost of the new building, intended to cater for up to 2,500 scholars, was £2,524. The work was completed late in 1818 and on December 13th the scholars walked in procession from George Leigh Street to the new Bennett Street school.

David Stott was born in Ripponden in West Yorkshire in 1779; his father was a farmer and also involved in the wool trade. The family moved to Manchester when David was 11 where he attended Manchester Grammar School. He worked for a silk manufacturer in the city, rising to a senior managerial position. He married in 1802 and had four children. He died in February 1848.

The first medals mentioned in connection with Bennett Street school was a distribution made to commemorate the Sunday School Movement golden jubilee in 1831 (confusing, I know, but the practice at the time was to count from *one* in calculating anniversaries rather than *zero* as we do today). This was celebrated on 8th September which was William IV's Coronation day. Medals were in fact struck which combine both events. It is probable that this was what the scholars received.



45mm. White metal. Unsigned. BHM 1556

The Manchester Committee of Management provided some 2,500 such medals suspended from blue ribbons.

The year 1851 saw the scholars at Bennett Street receiving two commemorative medals. The first, in September, marked the school's 50th anniversary.



45mm. White metal. Unsigned

Shortly after this, in October, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert visited Manchester and the city's Sunday school children – some 82,000 of them (yes, I have got the right number of noughts) assembled in Peel Park to greet them and were presented with medals. 3,000 of these were from the Bennett Street establishment alone.



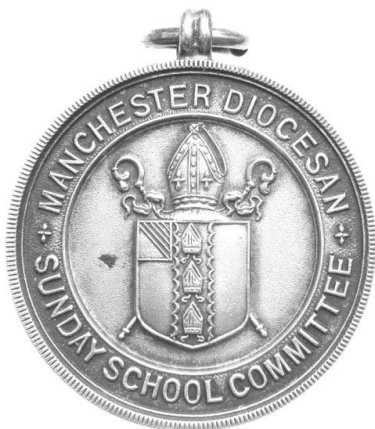
45mm. White metal. By Allen & Moore. WE: 663

As the city expanded housing in the New Cross area gave way to mills, workhouses and civic buildings. Attendance at Sunday Schools decreased but, although Bennett Street chose not to celebrate Victoria's 1887 Jubilee 200 scholars processed on Whit Monday wearing Jubilee medals – presumably those struck for the Manchester & Salford Sunday School, Committee.



38mm. White metal. Unsigned. WE: 2790A

The Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria was marked by the production of a souvenir mug depicting the facade of the school. Forty five of the school's staff were awarded the long service medal by the Quiver magazine to celebrate the occasion; Mr Samuel Goodwin receiving the silver version to mark 58 year's service. The Manchester Diocesan Sunday School Committee also made awards of its Long Service medals to teachers at Bennett Street at various times.



Notably the artist L.S.Lowry's mother was one of the school's organists in the 1890s and he was just 7 years old when first taken there – although there is no record of him attending regularly.

No commemorative items were produced for the school's centenary in 1901, nor does there seem to have been any awards of attendance or achievement medals at Bennett Street; records indicate that it was the practice to always give books as prizes.

Numbers attending the school continued to fall. There were 1564 scholars registered in 1890; by 1914 this had fallen to 861 and, in 1919, just 649.

The Scholars were given medals on the occasion of the 150th Anniversary of the Sunday School Movement in 1930 but these were the small brass ones generally available at the time.

The Coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953 was marked by the presentation of a Book of Common Prayer to the scholars, in line with the school's usual practice.

The 1950s and 60s saw a nationwide closing of many inner-city Sunday schools and the decision was taken that Bennett Street would close on Sunday October 30th 1966, the building being finally demolished in 1971.

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