

Hawkshead School, England, 1585 – 1909

by R. Carter Blaisdell, Editor

The Hawkshead Grammar School, Hawkshead, England, was established in 1585 for the boys in the newly established Hawkshead Parish, Diocese of Chester, on land given by the Archbishop of York, **Edwin Sandys**, whose boyhood home was Hawkshead.

Birthplace of Ralf Bleasdale

Ralf Bleasdale was born in Hawkshead in 1593 and would have been eligible to attend this school, if still living there when he turned eight in

1601. No record has been found to verify the names of students who attended in the early years of this school. Neither Ralf nor any other Bleasdale could be found in the Hawkshead Parish Register, 1568-1704, as edited by H. W. Cowperby Bemrose & Sons, London, 1897.

Preparation for Cambridge

Rev. **Peter Magson** was rector at Hawkshead 1585-1616. He was succeeded by Rev. **Francis Magson**, 1616-1647. The school was a free grammar school for boys ages 8 – 17. They were taught Latin, Greek, math, reading and writing six days a week. Attendance at the three-hour worship on Sunday was compulsory. A contest on the contents of the sermon was held on Monday.

Archbishop Sandys gave 50 pounds and quills [for writing] each year in support of a Headmaster. Because he was a graduate of St. John's College, Cambridge University, most all Hawkshead School graduates attended that college.

Enrollment in time averaged 95 boarding students. By 1670 the math scores were the highest in northern England and southern Scotland. **William Wordsworth** attended the school 1779-1787.

Room for the Poor and Orphaned

The reputation of the school prompted the Hawkshead Parish to require a quota of 20 boys from its parish to attend, four of whom were to be for the poor or orphaned. However, these four were taught math, reading and writing, but not Latin or Greek, which were required for attendance at St. John's College, Cambridge.

Seating was on the outside of the classroom along three walls in horseshoe fashion with a slanted writing table in front of each row of students. There were six classes on two floors.

Birch Rod Discipline

Discipline was 20 strokes with a birch rod. After three such disciplines the student was expelled. If one was late for class, caught swearing or gambling – 10 strokes. Card games were forbidden, but cockfighting was permitted.

Three pints of weak beer per day were allotted each student. Tobacco and smoking were considered fashionable and medicinal at lunchtime and in the evening. To abate the foul smell of the school rooms, sweet-smelling herbs, like lavender, were spread twice a week on the floor. There was a two-hour lunch break in the summer and one-hour in the winter.

There was a three-week holiday at Christmas and Easter. Marriages were arranged by parents, usually by the mother.

Watchful of Non-Conforming Puritans

In 17th Century the Bishop of Chester was in regular contact with the Headmaster to keep informed of “Non-Conformists,” because they would not conform to the teachings of the Church of England. They usually allied with the Presbyterians, Quakers, Baptists or Methodists. Hawkshead was the center of non-conformity in the 17th Century.

These non-conforming Puritans clashed with the established Church, and Roman Catholics were discriminated against and marginalized. Politically it became a clash between the high church Cavaliers and the Roundheads of Parliament, who sought more power. **Charles I** was crowned king in 1625 and required conformity of all his citizens to his Church of England.

Ralf Bleasdale leaves England for America

Ralf Bleasdale was a Puritan. During this period of civil and religious strife, Ralf left England for America on the Angel Gabriel in June 1635 with his wife, **Elizabeth (Parker) Bleasdale**, and their three-year-old son, **Henry**. They arrived with 27 other passengers at Pemaquid Point, Massachusetts – now Maine – August 14, 1635.

Puritans Fight with Cromwell’s Roundheads

The conflicts back in England boiled over into armed conflict. **Oliver Cromwell** led the Roundheads in a victory over the king’s Cavaliers in the Battle of Marston near York in 1644. “Psalm singing Puritans” had joined Cromwell’s army. Hawkshead became part of a presbytery within Lancashire County in 1646. Cromwell refused to be crowned king and became Lord Protector in 1653 until his death in 1658.

Public Education Causes School Closing

Parliament in 1870 passed a law requiring girls and boys to attend school. Some went only in the afternoon, but by 1900 it was compulsory to attend school full-time. In Hawkshead public education was introduced in 1880. By 1909 enrollment at the Hawkshead Grammar School had dwindled from 90 to 6 when the parish’s school was closed.

The school was reopened during World War II for children brought to Hawkshead from the nearby cities of Manchester and Liverpool.

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