

A Brief Look at a few Sunday School Medals (Part 2)

I must preface the second of my articles about Sunday School medals with an apology for a glaring omission from part one.

In discussing Bennett Street (Manchester) Sunday School's celebrations for the Centenary of the Sunday School movement in 1880 M.W.Lees states that: "*The customary parties were organised and medals bearing portraits of Robert Raikes and of (the) school were commissioned...*" It was not until a specimen of this particular medal was acquired recently that I realised that I had completely overlooked the above statement. This is the medal that was presented to the Bennett Street scholars in 1880:



44mm. White metal. Unsigned

Stockport Sunday School

It is probable that the Methodists in Stockport had the intent to establish some sort of Sunday school as early as 1777, land being purchased in that year by Matthew Mayer upon which houses were to be built in the upper rooms of which it was intended to start a school. Stockport Sunday School, however, dated its foundation from 11th November 1784 when the Rules and Orders governing its operation were published. The town was to be divided into six parts with a school in each; the 'schools' were not, at this time, concentrated units: '*scholars were scattered in top rooms in different houses*'. Despite this inconvenient arrangement by 1793 the total attendance is given as 1148. The Committee which ran the schools recognised the unsatisfactory nature of this arrangement and in

1803 proposed *'the erection of a large and commodious building'* and duly purchased land for this purpose. Joseph Mayer, the son of Matthew was one of the prime movers in this endeavour and was to be involved in the operation of the school, and its branches, until his death in 1857.

The foundation stone for the new, purpose built school was laid on 15th June 1805. Medallions were struck to commemorate this but it is not possible to illustrate them here (some are illustrated in *'Tokens and Commemorative Medals of Cheshire'* – see below). The new school was to be non-denominational and was open to *'Any children who labour for their living in the week day, are seven years old and upwards and not afflicted with any contagious distemper'*. They would be taught to read and write and, if they showed aptitude, some arithmetic too.

The opening ceremony was held on 21st December 1808. The 1810 summary of accounts for building expenses shows total cost to date as £6,534.16.0. – including *'loss by bad money'* (i.e. counterfeit coin) of £2.16.8!

A number of events are recorded in the first fifty years of the school's history, notable amongst which are:

In 1825, the foundation of an infants' school to which *'No child was to be admitted until it could run alone, nor suffered to remain after six years old'*.,

In 1831 the scholars were to have held a procession to mark the Coronation of William IV *'but the day was too rainy and inclement (the norm for Coronation days apparently) and after assembling in the school they were provided with refreshments and then dismissed'*.

In 1833, on 7th July the school was struck by lightning when in session. An 11 year old boy was killed and several other children were injured.

In 1846 2,000 children from Macclesfield Sunday School were brought on a visit.

1855 marked, of course, the golden jubilee of the school building and at a special meeting of the Committee on January 15th it was decided unanimously that *'a medal should be struck to commemorate the occasion'*; a *'Medal Committee..... (to include Joseph Mayer, by then aged 80).... was immediately appointed'*. By the time of the celebratory tea party held on Friday June 15th 1855 *'From the manufactory of Mr Thomas Otlet (sic), of Birmingham they had procured several*

thousand well-executed medals, in white metal, which could be sold (!) to the scholars at the low price of 4d each; and others of a more expensive kind, covered with glass; and a few most beautifully executed, in electro-gilt and bronze.'

A glazed example of this medal is illustrated in Edge (CM138B) but there is no record of an 'electro gilt specimen in any metal.



53mm. White metal. By Ottley. Edge CM138B

By 1855 the school enjoyed the services of 444 teachers to educate the 4,828 scholars registered with it and records show that the various celebrations held involved the consumption of, amongst other things: 325 lbs of corned beef, 108 lbs of butter and 625 gallons of tea.

1867 saw the launch, on a local reservoir, of a lifeboat for which the School had raised the sum of £420. The boat was formally presented to the Royal Nation Lifeboat Institution and was eventually to see service based at Dundalk on the east coast of Ireland.

In 1880 the Sunday School Movement celebrated its centenary and a huge number of medals were produced and distributed nationwide to commemorate the event (it is believed that some 800,000 were manufactured in Birmingham). Stockport School did not have its own medal made but chose a product of their 'go to' medallists, Thomas Ottley. Fortunately Wild describes this in detail in his book and so we know that this is what the Stockport scholars received:



44mm. White metal. By Thomas Ottley

On Sunday 13th June the scholars processed, many wearing their medals, to mark the occasion. Many also chose to wear them when attending the celebratory tea party held on the following Saturday.

1884 saw the centenary of the school and for this event a special medal was commissioned from Ottleys. It was decided that this was a suitable occasion to also remember Joseph Mayer, who had been significantly instrumental in founding the school. It would seem from Wild's account of the events held to mark the centenary that a small number of the medals in produced in silver were distributed. Brian Edge makes no mention of silver specimens but it is possible that the glazed example illustrated in his book and having 'a silver ring suspender' may in fact, underneath the glass, actually be entirely silver.



54mm. White metal and silver. By Thomas Ottley. Edge CM139B.

Stockport Sunday School commemorated the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign in 1887 in a number of ways, including a musical festival on April 4th and the inevitable teas. At what point the medal produced to commemorate the Jubilee was distributed we do not know but, in the interests of economy presumably, Ottleys had been asked to reuse the reverse die from the centenary medal of 1884 although a new die was employed for the obverse.



54mm. White metal. By Thomas Ottley. Edge CM140

In the late 19th century the school (and its branches) continued to thrive. In 1890 it was reported that 429 teachers were instructing 5114 registered scholars. By this date the school had seen 100,283 pass through its classrooms.



The Coronation of Edward VII in 1902 was the last event to be commemorated by Stockport Sunday School with the issue of a medal. On this occasion the medal was struck by Elkingtons through the agency of the Stockport jewellers J. Winter (their former premises are now a restaurant) whose name appears at the bottom of the reverse.



39mm. White metal. By Elkington. Edge CM 141



As with all Sunday schools the 20th century saw a gradual reduction in support and attendance and a purpose built building of the size of Stockport could not survive this. The school closed in 1963 and efforts to preserve the building were unsuccessful leading to its demolition in 1971.

Bibliography:

Wild, W.I., *The History of the Stockport Sunday School And Its Branch Schools* (Published privately 1891)

Stockport Sunday School – One Hundred & Fiftieth Birthday Celebrations – Official Handbook (1934)

Edge, Brian, *Tokens and Commemorative Medals of Cheshire Since 1820* (Brian Edge 2008)