

# Robert Raikes

Robert Raikes was an English philanthropist and Anglican layman. He is renowned for initiating the Sunday school movement. He inherited a publishing business from his father, becoming proprietor of the Gloucester Journal in 1757. By 1831 nearly 1,250,000 children were attending his schools, they are seen as the first schools of the English state school system.  
~Wikipedia



Born: September 14, 1736, Gloucester, United Kingdom  
Died: April 5, 1811, Gloucester, United Kingdom

## Robert Raikes and How We Got Sunday School

From Christianity.com

Robert knelt beside his father's grave after the funeral. Where would he go now? What would he do with his life? He'd always worked beside his father in the printing shop. But now those days were gone forever.

He mopped his teary face with a handkerchief and stood to his feet. Leaving the graveyard, Robert walked toward the printing shop that now belonged to him. He and his father had spent the last several years there, working on Gloucester, England's newspaper, the Gloucester Journal.

Robert opened the creaky front door of the shop and slowly walked inside. The familiar smell of ink and machinery greeted him. Robert picked up the last copy of the Gloucester Journal published by his father that year, in 1757. "I'll make you proud, Father," he said aloud. "With God's help, I'll keep your Gloucester Journal alive."

The days passed and Robert worked hard. He made the newspaper larger, improved its layout, and hired new writers. Soon even more people wanted to read the Gloucester Journal!

On his days off, Robert often visited prisoners in Gloucester. There he found the castoffs of society living in the most appalling circumstances. Most of them were sick or even dying from overwork. They lived in crowded, filthy spaces with almost no food. Even children were sometimes imprisoned along with the worst criminals. Robert felt sad to see these sick and starving prisoners. But what could one person do to ease the pain of so many? He decided to write about the terrible prisons in his newspaper.

## **The White Slaves of England**

One evening he walked down St. Catherine's Street to look for his gardener. Suddenly, he saw a group of ragged children. They looked just as poor and overworked as the prisoners he visited. A little boy in a tattered blue shirt swore as he tackled another boy half his size.

"Git your hands offa me!" the little boy yelled as the two of them wrestled on the cobblestones. Soon a crowd of children gathered around, noisily cheering.

"Hey, stop fighting!" Robert shouted at them as he pulled the two boys apart. "Go home, all of you."

As the children walked away, Robert asked the gardener's wife, "Who are these children?"

"Ah, pay no mind to them," she answered. "Everyone calls them the white slaves of England."

"Slaves?" asked Robert.

"They work 12 hours a day or longer in the mills and sweatshops," the woman answered. "Most of their parents are in prison or dead."

Robert cringed. He knew that if his father had died when he was little, he could have been one of these poor children. "When do they go to school?" he asked.

"School? They don't go to school. They have to work to live." she answered.

And Sundays are the worst. It's their only day off and they run around like wild animals!"

## **Sunday Schools Started**

Robert knew that the future was grim for these children who had to work all the time with no hope of an education. Worse yet, with no one to teach them the good news of the Gospel or how to live God's way, they were likely to end up cold, sick and starving in the dreadful prisons. An idea began to form in Robert's mind which he shared with his friend, Reverend Thomas Stock.

"Let's start a Sunday school!" said Robert. "School on Sunday?" asked Thomas.

"Yes, school on Sunday!" answered Robert. "We'll teach them to read and write part of the day and teach them the Bible for the rest of the day."

"It's a great idea!" said Thomas.

Robert waited expectantly the first Sunday for the children to come to the new school, but only a few came.

"Marcy, why don't more of the children come to Sunday school?" he asked the little red-haired girl with freckles.

Marcy looked down. "Cuz our clothes ain't no good," she answered.

"Now I understand," answered Robert. "Well, you tell your friends that all they need is a clean face and combed hair, okay, Marcy?"

Marcy smiled. "You're nice."

Robert squatted down beside her. "I'll tell you what, Marcy, I think you're nice, too. Here's a penny for coming to class today. If you work very hard and learn your lessons, you'll get a special reward."

"Really?" asked Marcy, her sparkling eyes fixed on the candy Robert held in his hand. "I'll do my very best!"

### **Sunday Schools Stop Crime**

It didn't take long until Robert Raikes and Reverend Thomas Stock had 100 children ages 6 to 14 attending their Sunday schools. Even though the children were taught only one day a week, their behavior began to improve. Now they had something to look forward to after working so hard every day. The policemen of the city told Robert that the children weren't stealing and fighting like before.

Robert waited three years to see if his Sunday schools were a success. Then he printed a story about the new Sunday schools. Soon, about 4,000 new Sunday schools were started in towns all over England. Robert even used his printing press to publish reading books, spelling books, Bible study books, and copies of the Scriptures for the Sunday schools.

### **The World Marches On**

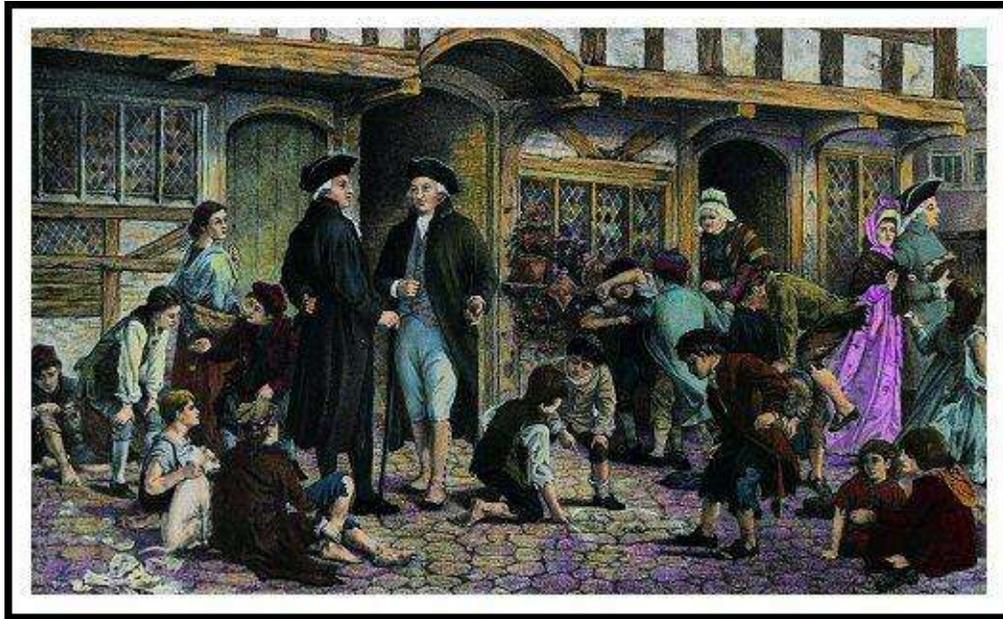
One Sunday, Thomas and Robert walked up the street to the Sunday school building. Thomas said, "Robert, your father would be proud of what you've done with his newspaper. He'd be proud of your Sunday schools, too, although you know--everyone is calling you 'Bobby Wild Goose and his ragged regiment.'"

Robert laughed. "I've been called worse names than 'Wild Goose,' I think," he answered.

Robert looked around at the hundreds of children now attending his Sunday school and his face grew quite serious. "Thomas, my father died and his father before him died. One day we will grow old and die, too. But the world won't die with us. The world marches forth on the feet of little children."

Thomas patted his friend on the back. "So it does, Robert. So it does."

**This article can be found on: <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/church-history-for-kids/robert-raikes-and-how-we-got-sunday-school-11635043.html>**



***Robert Raikes on the Street.***

Photo from <http://18thcenturyculture.wordpress.com/tag/sunday-school/>



***Robert Raikes House, Southgate Street, Gloucester.***

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