

*DR RADCLIFFE - AN OLD MAN LOOKS BACK*

Dr Samuel Radcliffe was under house arrest and in failing health when he sat down in his study at Brasenose College to write his Will on 24 April 1648. The Parliament side in the Civil War, which had captured Oxford after a siege in 1646, had been trying for months to eject him from his position as College Principal. Radcliffe pleaded ill health and refused to budge, so soldiers were stationed outside his door. Probably for this reason, his long and rambling Will was drawn up "without the Lawyer his advice for the most part". The college would face a lawsuit before it was all sorted out.

Born in 1580, Samuel Radcliffe had been at Brasenose for most of his life, starting as a student in 1597 and rising to Principal in 1614. Three years later, he also became Rector of Steeple Aston, a benefice which was in the gift of the College. This was a perk of office then, but one he seems to have taken seriously enough. What to do with his property in such chaotic times? Radcliffe's first thoughts were for the future of his College, founded in 1509 but still only half-built. Plans for a new Library and Chapel had preoccupied him for years, and his Will included funding for them. Despite the legal tangles, both were completed by 1666. He also left money to pay off debts to local tradesmen - the college was far from wealthy at the time.



*Old Rochdale School and Middleton Old Grammar School :  
models for Dr Radcliffe's School, Steeple Aston?*

Radcliffe's thoughts then turned to the school he had founded in 1640 at Steeple Aston. Using rents from land he owned, he doubled the pay of its teacher from £10 to £20 a year. Another £10 would help promising pupils from Steeple Aston to pursue further studies. If none could be found here, then they should be "chosen out of the School of Rochdale, where I was born", or failing that "out of the School of Middleton whence I came to Oxford". Here Radcliffe is recalling his own childhood, and perhaps revealing the models on which his own school was based. Both these schools had been founded in Elizabethan times as part of a drive to widen education and to replace the old abbey schools which had been swept away by Henry VIII.

Rochdale Grammar School was set up in 1565 by Archbishop Parker, with advice from Samuel's grandfather, a local landowner, Charles Radcliffe of Todmorden Hall. According to a history of the school, Samuel's father, Robert, served as its first head (though other sources describe him as a lawyer or clergyman). Evidently Samuel himself was mainly educated at Middleton School, established in 1586 a few miles from Rochdale, possibly boarding with an uncle who was the Rector there. Education in these places is vastly different today; but perhaps pictures of their original buildings (above) can still give us some idea what Dr. Radcliffe had had in mind back in 1640, when he came to found his own village school here in Northside close to his Rectory.

**Geoffrey Lane.**