

**A HISTORICAL SKETCH OF  
WARRINGTON  
ACADEMY. VOL. XI.  
NOVEMBER 11TH, 1858**

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A Historical Sketch of Warrington Academy. Vol. XI. November 11th, 1858 by Henry A. Bright

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**HENRY A. BRIGHT**

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From the TRANSACTIONS of the HISTORIC SOCIETY OF LANCASHIRE  
AND CHESHIRE. VOL. XI. Read November 11th, 1858.

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A HISTORICAL SKETCH  
OF  
WARRINGTON ACADEMY.

BY  
*Henry A. Bright*  
HENRY A. BRIGHT, B.A.

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## A HISTORICAL SKETCH OF WARRINGTON ACADEMY.

*By Henry A. Bright, B.A.*

(READ 11TH NOVEMBER, 1858.)

A few years ago a parcel of papers—some letters, some memoranda—which had belonged to the Rev. J. Seddon, the founder of the Warrington Academy, was rescued from the hands of a Liverpool cheesemonger, who was using them for the ordinary purposes of his shop. Among these papers were several letters of Priestley, of Kippis, and of Aikin. There were others of men of lesser note, which were, however, not without an interest, inasmuch as they threw a new light on the history of the Warrington Academy.

From these papers, then, at the request of the Council of the Historic Society, I have compiled this brief sketch. In addition to the Seddon papers I have made use of other materials from the following sources:—

I.—A volume of unpublished papers concerning the Academy, collected by Serjeant Heywood, who is not unknown as the author of the "Vindication of Fox's History."

II.—A series of articles in the "Monthly Repository" on the Academy, by the Rev. W. Turner.

III.—The Lives of Dr. Priestley, Dr. Aikin, and Gilbert Wakefield, and Dr. Kendrick's "Warrington Worthies."\*

IV.—Some interesting manuscript lectures of Mr. Marsh of Warrington.

V.—Information for which I am indebted to Mr. Beaumont of Warrington, and Miss Lucy Aikin.

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\* It is owing to the great kindness of Dr. Kendrick that this paper is illustrated with the engravings of the Academy and the Tutors' houses.

VI.—The original minute books of the Academy, which were lent to me by the Secretary of Manchester New College, the Rev. R. Brook Aspland.

If in the arrangement of this ample material I fail in exciting your interest, the fault, I feel, will rest with me. The history of the Warrington Academy must in itself always have a value for the literary man, for the theologian, and for him to whom the history of Lancashire has any interest. At Warrington Academy were collected some of the noblest literati of their day. Here the free thought of the English Presbyterians first began to crystallize into the Unitarian theology, which they have since maintained. Here for a time was the centre of the liberal politics, and the literary taste of the entire county. Am I exaggerating the importance of this Academy? I do not think so. But if so,—something, perhaps, may be excused to one who is descended from some of the earliest supporters of the Academy, and who owes many of his own highest views to the teaching, which his family first learnt from those old Warrington tutors.

In the year 1753 the failure or decay of the several Academies belonging to the English Presbyterian body at Findern and Kendal, and elsewhere, caused no inconsiderable anxiety to the more thoughtful and earnest among the liberal dissenters. Where were they to look for their future supply of ministers? Where could those ministers be educated in a theology unshackled by creed and doctrine? On none did these questions press with greater weight than on John Seddon, the young minister at Warrington. The idea of founding a new Academy took possession of him, and the idea once formed was never dropped until it had been carried out in action. Well might the Rev. Philip Holland in after years bear witness to "the concern which he had ever expressed for its support, "honour, success; the indefatigable pains which he took for this purpose; "the indifference which he shewed to fame or censure, to good or evil "report, so that he might serve the general designs of the institution." Lying before me is a large mass of Mr. Seddon's correspondence relative to the foundation of the Academy. How he worked, and wrote, and explained, and begged! He is never discouraged, though his discouragements are innumerable. He is never down-hearted, though his friends are always suggesting difficulties, and prophesying evil. Mr. Daniel Bayley

of Manchester thinks the design too large, and "should not London lay the foundation, and we be only supplemental," and "is not so populous, so pleasurable, so divided, and so dear a place as Manchester very unfit for a seat of the Muses." Mr. Peter Touchet, of Manchester, thinks that Warrington should not be mentioned as the site of the Academy. Mr. John Mort, of Chowbent,—to whom Mrs. Barbauld addressed some lines beginning "Happy old man!" and whom she characterises as "O rude of speech, yet rich in genuine worth,"—this Mr. Mort is afraid "our richer neighbours will not be over zealous in the affair." Mr. John Wilson, of Rivington, will subscribe the munificent sum of five guineas if necessary, but thinks it would be hardly proper to subscribe before Lord Willoughby. Lord Willoughby of Parham, who afterwards became first President of the Academy, was, I suppose, the most important personage among the English Presbyterians of this date, and it is amusing enough to notice how respectfully, (with one exception,) all Mr. Seddon's correspondents name him. "Pray my duty to Lord Willoughby, "if you think proper," writes the Rev. R. Godwin, of Gateacre. The eminent Dr. John Taylor, of Norwich, rejoices that "Lord Willoughby and "so many of Harry Hoghton's family have come into the subscription."

But before Lord Willoughby had entered into the scheme—which important date appears to be October 11th, 1754—a long circular had been sent round in July of the same year, signed by Daniel Bayley, John Lees, afterwards Sir Caryll Worsley, and seven others. This circular gives as the subscriptions already promised—

Manchester . . . . .	£94	10	0
Liverpool . . . . .	48	4	0
Birmingham . . . . .	44	12	6
Warrington . . . . .	31	16	6

£217 2 0

In the April of the next year the subscription mounts up. Lord Willoughby will give his ten guineas, Sir H. Hoghton's family "will encourage us," says Mr. Seddon, "so that our present subscription amounts to about £300 per annum." Dr. Taylor of Norwich promises subscriptions from his congregation, and Bristol and Exeter will probably aid the cause. Leeds, however, looks coldly upon the plan, and thinks "the Glasgow education" sufficient for their wants. Liverpool, too, as



may be guessed from the smallness of her contribution, is somewhat lukewarm. The fact was, that Liverpool regarded the whole affair as a Manchester scheme, and with that pleasing spirit of jealous rivalry which has always existed between the two towns, the Liverpool men insisted on the site of the Academy being Ormskirk instead of Warrington. And so a paper was drawn up at Liverpool, with seven excellent reasons for preferring Ormskirk. These reasons, however, do not bring conviction to the supporters of Warrington, and the Rev. R. Godwin, in a letter to Mr. Seddon, observes that "some of them are *false*, others *dubious*, and all, "whether true or not, *trifling and impertinent*."\* And then comes a rejoinder from "the gentlemen in Manchester," and then a printed letter from Sam. Angier, Benj. Heywood, Joseph Brooks, Wm. Lightbody, and other of "the gentlemen in Liverpool," and then "Remarks on a letter "from the gentlemen in Manchester to the gentlemen in Liverpool, subscribers to the intended Academy. April 27th, 1757." This last letter shews, I regret to say, that "the gentlemen in Liverpool" finding that they are not powerful enough to carry their favourite, Ormskirk, lose their temper most completely. Every fourth word in this last letter is italicised; and after much cutting sarcasm they indignantly demand of their opponents, "are not such gentlemen more properly the authors of contention "and division?"

The 80th of June, 1757, was now approaching, when the first general meeting of the supporters of the Academy was to be held. A stormy meeting was evidently expected, and it was more than probable that the whole scheme might founder just as it was getting fairly under weigh. Some anonymous friend of the Academy thinks it well before the meeting to distribute some printed "Rules proposed to be observed for the better "regulation of proceedings in the affairs of the Academy now depending." There are nine of these rules, referring chiefly to Proxies, and the necessity of a good understanding between the Trustees, and Rule VI. runs thus:— "To remove all ground of emulation between Liverpool and Manchester "(where it is mostly feared) in the choice of persons to carry on the Academy, let Manchester have the nomination of one, and Liverpool another,

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\* In another letter, however, this same Mr. Godwin admits that "several are daily "complaining that the people of Manchester are for managing everything relative to the "Academy, independent of others; that Liverpool is ignorant of all their measures, and "has not once been consulted upon any one occasion."

"&c.;" that "&c." expresses a good deal, and probably means (for these rules evidently emanate from Liverpool) that Liverpool may fix on the site of the Academy, and that Manchester, perhaps, may then be allowed to provide an architect.

There are two thin old vellum-covered volumes, which contain the Minutes of the Warrington Academy. The second volume is only about one-half filled, for the hopes of the Trustees were but partially realized, and the Academy was closed in 1786, after a useful but precarious existence of nine-and-twenty years. It was on the 30th June, 1757, (as we find from these minutes) that the first meeting of Trustees was held, and Warrington was after all the place of meeting. Twenty-five Trustees were present. Two were from Birmingham, and eight from Manchester. The Ministers of Gateacre and Bolton, Mr. Mort of Chowbent, and from Liverpool, Arthur and Benjamin Heywood, Dr. Angier, Richard Savage, Thomas Wharton, Thomas Bentley and James Percival were also present. Warrington itself was represented by the indefatigable Mr. Seddon, Mr. Elias Bent (who now lies buried in the Cairo Street Chapel grave-yard) and three other laymen. After reading the "proposals for carrying into execution a plan for the liberal education of youth," a long list of resolutions were proposed and carried. Mr. Seddon, in whose handwriting the early minutes seem to be, appears, as well he might be, astonished at the unanimity which after all the meeting showed, and writes, "resolutions in *all* "which the whole assembly was perfectly unanimous." Perhaps, the gentlemen of the rival towns were tired of quarrelling; perhaps, they adopted the suggestion of dividing between them the patronage and appointments; perhaps, and most probably, the more important resolutions were modified at the time, so as to meet the wishes of all. Be this as it may, Lord Willoughby is appointed President, Mr. John Lees of Manchester, Vice-President, Mr. Arthur Heywood of Liverpool, Treasurer, and Mr. Seddon, Secretary. Local Treasurers in the large towns are then appointed. The subscription list is ascertained to amount to £469 5s., and the benefactions to £148 11s. Four Tutors are recognised as necessary to render the design complete, but at present it is more prudent to appoint three only. Dr. Taylor of Norwich is to be Tutor in Divinity; Mr. Holt of Kirkdale, to be Tutor in Natural Philosophy; and Mr. Dyer of London, to be Tutor in Languages and Polite Literature, and for the present in Moral Philosophy. Each of these tutors is to have £100 per annum from

the fund, and "with respect to dwelling-houses, are to be at their own expenses." Poor students are exempted from payment of fees, but richer ones must pay £2 2s. yearly to each of the tutors. And then comes the resolution over which Manchester and Liverpool had already quarrelled in anticipation, and which was evidently drawn up with the most diplomatic care:—"That for the present, and as a temporary settlement, Warrington "is the most convenient situation for the Academy, and that Messrs. Hart, "Bent, Leigh, Turner and Seddon are hereby empowered to contract for "houses immediately." A managing committee is then appointed, certain regulations respecting their functions are passed, and it is declared that a general meeting of trustees must be held every year. And thus the new Academy was started.

On the 20th October, in this same year, a letter is sent by the Committee to the various subscribers. Houses suitable for the Academy have been engaged "for seven years only." Dr. Taylor and Mr. Holt are already settled at Warrington, and (as for some unexplained reason Mr. Dyer is not settled) they have promised to divide between them the Languages and Polite Literature, and Moral Philosophy. The \*Tutors will take boarders into their houses at £15 per annum for those who had two months' vacation, and £18 per annum for those who had no vacation; these terms, however, are exclusive of "tea, washing, fire and candles." Three students have already arrived.

The choice of a third tutor was matter of difficulty. Dr. Taylor recommended Mr. Scott of Norwich; Dr. Benson of London suggested the Rev. Mr. Priestley of Needham Market; others think Mr. Aikin of Kibworth would be the best man, and the Rev. Mr. Jenkins of Montgomeryshire has his supporters. At last the choice falls on Mr. (afterwards Dr.) Aikin, and a long, long letter from Mr. Seddon, dated March 11th, 1758, and preserved in the minutes of the Academy, informs him of the fact. I will not trouble you by the enumeration of Mr. Aikin's virtues, and the names of the trustees who recommended him, which take up a great part of this letter. One passage, however, is curious enough, as showing what travelling in England was just one hundred years ago.

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\* "They knew better than to usurp the title of *Professors*, as so many do in these "days from ignorance or presumption; only a chartered body can give Professorships."—*Letter from Miss Aikin.*