

BACKGROUND OF DONALD LYLE'S  
GIFT OF A BRASS RUBBING

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John Lyon, Founder of Harrow

Harrow, twelve miles northwest of London, surrounds an isolated hill, the summit 345 feet above the London (Thames Valley) area. This eminence, with some surrounding area, was granted in 824 A.D. to the Archbishop of Canterbury by the daughter of King Cenulf of Mercia, an early Saxon realm. The land remained in the possession of Canterbury for 700 years.

During this time, it was devoted to religious life. Teaching was the task of the clergy who gave instructions to the "choir boys" in Latin for ecclesiastical purposes. The boys were also taught rudiments of Anglo-Saxon speech. This school, no doubt, was established in the Middle Ages on very meager support. For recreation, this property was also used by the Canterbury assembly as a hunting lodge and ground.

Archbishop Lanfranc began the building of a Norman Church on the summit of the hill in 1087 A.D. It was consecrated in 1094 as St. Mary Church. It has gone through many alterations these past centuries. For years it was the Chapel of the Grammar School, and later the Harrow Public School, until the increased enrollment exceeded its seating capacity, when several other chapels, and finally, in 1855, a beautiful chapel of considerable capacity was built on High Street.

One of the chief supporters of Harrow, John Lyon (1514-1592), a native of the neighboring parish of Preston, a philanthropic yeoman, gave annually during his life 20 marks to Harrow to pay for educating 30 poor children.

During this same period (1536-1547), in the reign of Henry VIII, various Acts were forced

suppressing the Church supported schools, and Harrow suffered with the others.

In 1545, the Manor of Harrow and the Rectory Manor were surrendered to the Crown. The King granted the Rectory Manor to Christ Church, Oxford, and the Manor of Harrow to Sir Thomas North, his aid in the dissolution.

After the death of Henry VIII in 1547, his son, Edward VI, and daughter, Mary I, during their short reigns, endeavored to overcome the damage to and suppression of these "fonts of knowledge and learning" with efforts to reestablish or establish new grammar and public schools.

It was left to Queen Elizabeth I to bring forth the flower of literature and restore education through persistent efforts, by Acts and requests. She called on the nobility, and all others, who could and would contribute to this project. The country gentry, yeomen and civil servants were solicited.

John Lyon, who prior to the dissolution had contributed generously to Harrow education, increased his donations, and aided in its reconstruction and, in 1572, secured a charter from Queen Elizabeth permitting him to reconstitute the educational system in Harrow.

Lyon endowed, at his death in 1592, his property with certain specifications including admission of "foreigners" from other parishes; increase of salary to teachers for better faculty; certain methods of teaching; religious instruction; etc. For this he is revered as "Benefactor of the Grammar School" and the "founder" of Harrow.

I was conducted on a tour through Harrow School, ending at St. Mary Church, by Mrs. W. whose home we had visited several times. She lived in the past home of Frances Trollop who came to the States in 1827, and, upon her return, in 1831 wrote "The Manners of the Americans," a disparaging and derogatory account of the pioneer days in Cincinnati and other parts of our country.

This, in a fuller account, was given in a Budget paper in March 1973. With your indulgence I would like to repeat, in part, the ending.

On entering the Church Vestibule one sees a sign "Brass Rubbing Discontinued." (Footnote -- In a book entitled "Brass Rubbing" by Malcolin Norris, 1965, Dover Press, is written on page 108, "The series at Harrow is particularly fine but rubbing is not allowed." This was because vandals had entered the church and defaced the brasses dating from 1370 to 1613 A.D., altogether thirteen in number.

A red runner down the middle aisle of the Chancel covered them for protection. The Vicar turned aside the runner for our view. I was so anxious to make a rubbing, especially of John Lyon and his wife in Elizabethan dress, below which was a plaque in commemoration by Queen Elizabeth. The Vicar shook his head when I asked permission -- he could make no exceptions.

My hostess whispered in my ear, "Leave it to me." And sure enough, she had coaxed the Vicar to allow her, and her son, to make a rubbing when the church was closed if she promised to get it out of the country immediately. And here it is. I want to give it to the Literary Club which has meant so much to me.

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