

Reverend Thomas Taylor (c.1766-1853) and his son Reverend Thomas Rawson Taylor (1807-1835)

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Reverend Thomas Taylor was the Minister at the Ossett Green Independent Congregational Church between 1795 and the 16th September 1808 when he left to become the minister of the Little Horton Lane Congregational Chapel, Bradford. During his successful ministry the chapel was greatly enlarged and during his ministry here he baptised 575 children. His eldest child, Thomas Rawson Taylor, one of four sons and three daughters born to Thomas and his wife, Mary Rawson, was born in Ossett in May 1807 and was baptised by his father at the same Church. Thomas Rawson Taylor followed his father into the faith.

The Independent Congregational Chapel, Ossett Green, was built following the raising of subscriptions in 1732-1733. Before then, Mr Richard Foster set aside part of his pressing shop for Mr. Thomas Dickenson to preach. Early Chapel members were described as *“thoughtful hard headed men in whom the emotional was not so strongly developed as the intellectual”*

The first chapel was later described as being a basic barn like structure with stabling for the horses of the many members who travelled some distance to worship. In 1883, the third chapel to be built on the same site was opened and the last service was held there on Easter Sunday 1973. This building has now been demolished and replaced by housing.



Revd. Mr. Taylor, Ossett, Yorkshire

Reverend Taylor's predecessor at Ossett Green, was the Reverend John Coulson from Yelverton who served there for a very short time in 1788, having himself succeeded Reverend George Haggerston from Hopton. Reverend Haggerston had served at Ossett Green for 22 years between 1765 and 1787. Between May 1788 and 1795 the Church was supplied by ministers and Northowram students .

Thomas Taylor himself was described as being of the Northowram and Idle Academies. Born about 1766, little is known of his early life except that he may have been the Reverend Thomas Taylor who was one of John Wesley's handpicked preachers responsible for the establishment in 1792 of a Chapel in Moor End Street, Ormskirk. The Chapel was subsequently abandoned following riots and opposition of the "rabble".

By 1795, it is known that Thomas had moved to Ossett but his work in Ormskirk, should it to be him, he continued in his absence and in 1801 a room there was fitted out by the Independents (Congregationalists). It was forced to close

through Anglicans and violent mob opposition. Ormskirk was "attacked" again by the Methodists through the preaching of the Rev. Adam Clarke, who preached from the Fish Stones in Aughton Street.

It is also known that Thomas studied at Samuel Walker's Academy, Northowram. The date of his admission is uncertain but the Academy opened in 1783, when Thomas would have been 17 years of age, and closed in 1794. Thomas studied there until this latter year and thereafter at Airedale Independent College for a short period in 1795-1796. This appears to have overlapped slightly with his Ossett Green ministry which is said to have begun in 1795.

That there may have been relationship between Thomas Taylor and John Wesley may also have been the reason for Thomas securing the position of minister at Ossett Congregational Church in 1795. In his only recorded visit to Ossett, John Wesley preached at an early Methodist chapel on Prospect Road (formerly Back Lane) on April 24th 1790. He was then in his 87th year, his text being 'Philippians iv, 7'. John Wesley died the following year.

Thomas married Mary Rawson at St Peter's Parish Church Leeds on the 16th July 1806 when he was described as being a Gentleman of Dewsbury parish and Mary, as a spinster of Leeds parish. The couple were married by licence and the service was officiated by Richard Foster, Curate. Bride and bridegroom signed their own names and the marriage was solemnised in the presence of three members of the Rawson family.

Mary Rawson's origins are uncertain, but it is possible that she was the daughter of Thomas and Mary Rawson and was baptised on the 3rd November 1766 at the Independent or Congregational Church at Keighley, Yorkshire. This church was formed there at the beginning of 1700 and in 1745 the Reverend George Haggerston was pastor there before removing to Hopton and, in 1765, to Ossett.

Thus Reverend Thomas Taylor served as minister at Ossett Congregational Church for thirteen years between 1795 and September 1808 when, with his wife and first child Thomas Rawson Taylor, he removed to the Horton Lane Congregational Church, Bradford. Some sources record his removal to Bradford may have been a little earlier and close to his son's first birthday, in May 1808.

The ministry of Reverend Thomas Taylor at Bradford Horton Lane Chapel Congregational Church was particularly valuable and his congregation was latterly very large. During his pastorate several enlargements of the chapel and premises took place. Mr Taylor lived to advanced years and resigned his office in 1835 (the same year in which his eldest son, Thomas Rawson Taylor, died). Thomas Taylor died at his Bradford home on 3rd October 1853, aged 86 years, greatly respected by all.

Little of detail has been discovered of his ministry in Horton Lane, Bradford, but the more detailed exposition of his eldest son's life, which follows, records his whereabouts during that son's, sadly, short life. This and other records indicate that the rest of Thomas' life was dedicated to the Bradford Church. From the age of seven years, in 1814, his eldest son, Thomas Rawson Taylor, was first educated at Bradford Grammar School, and there are many references to his visits home to Bradford. Thomas Taylor's other six children appear to have been born in Bradford and he lost his second son, William (Bill) and one of his daughters, Mary, both in their teenage years, at his Bradford home in March 1826 and June 1827 respectively. Both died from pulmonary disease, probably consumption (Tuberculosis), which in 1835 would also claim the life of Thomas Rawson Taylor. Having suffered the tragic loss of two of his children in the prime of their lives Thomas also accompanied his eldest son on several journeys to assist the latter's search for better health until his death in 1835.

On 12th May 1841 at the ordination of Reverend William Atherton at the Independent Chapel Bingley Reverend Thomas Taylor of Bradford offered up the ordination prayer with imposition of hands. By 1841 Thomas Taylor would have been in his mid-70s. He died at his Bradford home on the 3rd October 1853, at the age of 86 years.

Thomas Rawson Taylor (1807-1835), was the eldest of four sons and three daughters born to the Reverend Thomas Taylor. Thomas Rawson Taylor was born at Ossett, near Wakefield on the 9th May 1807 and baptised at his father's Ossett Green Congregational Church on the 25th May 1807. At the age of approximately one year he removed with his parents to Bradford, although it is known that he re-visited his Ossett birthplace on several occasions in his

subsequent, but short, life. In his early years, as an infant child, he grew fond of poetry and it is said that his nurse would hear his verses as he developed his thirst for knowledge.



Thomas Rawson Taylor (1807 -1835)

From the age of seven years in 1814 he was educated at the Free Grammar School, Bradford, under the tutorship of Mr Slack and, from 1818 to 1821, under the care of the Reverend Dr. Clunie, at the Leaf Square Academy, near Manchester. It was here that he developed a taste for literary composition and where he honed his talents as a speaker on behalf of the Juvenile Missionary Society. In 1821 he returned from Manchester to Bradford for a further short period of study at the Grammar School and applied himself to the classics.

Before the age of fifteen years in early 1822, until just before his seventeenth birthday, he was engaged to work in the counting house of Messrs. J. Wood & Sons, Bradford merchants. It was during this time, in 1823, that his brother, William (Bill), two years younger than Thomas, suffered his first bout of a pulmonary disease. From May 1824 he was apprenticed in the printers and bookselling business of Mr. Jonathan Dunn of Nottingham. Mr Dunn was also Coroner and Thomas acted as his clerk at two Inquests. His work places had been carefully considered and chosen by his father as the young Thomas struggled with his desire to enter the church. At different times during this period he and his father concluded that his commitment fell short of that necessary for the church.

In Nottingham he was embraced as one of theirs and the religious Dunn family made him part of their routine of daily family prayer and introduced him to their social circle. It was during this period, 1824, that his father became ill and, still only seventeen years of age, all of these experiences would mould Thomas Rawson Taylor's future.

He became influenced by the preaching of the Reverend Mr. R Cecil of St. John's Street, Nottingham and in early December 1824 he was proposed for admission to the church. In June 1825 he returned to his family home at Bradford for discussions with his father of his future to find his brother, William, very ill with a recurrence of pulmonary disease and a violent cough. In September 1825, in Nottingham, Thomas Rawson was afflicted with dysentery which was prevalent in the City at that time.

By this time he was already preaching in local churches and in March 1826 he left his position in Nottingham and returned to his family home in Bradford. This coincided with the death of his brother, William on the 30th March 1826. By now he was influenced by strong religious desires, and he resolved to enter the church. Thomas came under the care of the Reverend William Vint at the Idle Academy (later to be named the Airedale Independent College), near Bradford in September 1826, aged nineteen years, to prepare for the Congregational ministry.

In June 1827, while at Idle College he had news that his sister, Mary, had returned home from school with an inflammation of the lungs from which she never recovered. She died at the family's Bradford home shortly thereafter. In a period of reflection Thomas visited Nottingham where he remained until August 1827, but by the following month he had returned to his preaching and studies as he readied himself for a twenty mile walk from Idle to Pateley Bridge to preach three sermons on the Sabbath.

In a letter dated October 1827 he recalls the town of his birth, Ossett, in the following terms:

"I was born at Ossett near Wakefield and am still called by a host of linty clothiers their "awn barn""

In November 1827 he journeyed to Settle and to Sedbergh to preach of a Sabbath often remaining for several weeks for other services, teaching and preaching. He often complains of his accommodation and of the people in Idle and in some of the towns of his visit but there is no evidence of any criticism of Ossett, the village of his birth.

On 14th February 1828 he writes from Airedale College, Idle to a friend in the following terms;

"..... It is past midnight, and Friday. To-morrow I have to walk through the snow to Ossett, seventeen miles. This Ossett is the place where I was born and which I have never visited since about the eighth or ninth year....."

Although still at Airedale College in early July 1828, Thomas Rawson Taylor was preaching on the Sabbath at his father's church in Bradford. He had also journeyed to preach at Sheffield on one weekend before moving to preach at Nottingham, subsequently returning to Bradford in early August 1828. His preaching at Sheffield, Howard Street, enthused the congregation who approached him to be their pastor even though he had two more years to serve at Airedale College. His father much preferred him to remain at Horton Lane, Bradford as his assistant although this option was not to Thomas Rawson Taylor's liking. Instead he expressed a preference for the smaller Sheffield congregation (about 600-700 souls) compared to the larger Bradford congregation (about 1200 souls).

It was about this time that Thomas' health took a turn for the worst. He began to spit blood, a curse that was to follow him for the remainder of his short life. His medical advisers instructed him that his preaching must cease for a long while to avoid exertion to his lungs where a blood vessel had ruptured. Thomas acknowledged the seriousness of his affliction. On the 3rd September 1828 he left Bradford with his father for Bridlington Quay where he remained convalescing for six weeks. After a further week in Leeds he returned to Airedale in November 1828 and was asked by Howard Street, Sheffield to preach to them. An offer he declined on medical grounds and it was to be four months later, in March 1829 before he was able to accept their invitation.

However, his health had not improved and in July 1829 he had to quit his studies at Airedale. He was still only 22 years of age. He took his usual refuge for recovery in Bridlington Quay. At Airedale College the tutor, Reverend William Vint was also in poor health and sought Thomas' agreement to spend less time in his ministry and more time as a tutor. By September 1829 he felt well enough to preach again and was welcomed by Howard Street, Sheffield who shortly afterwards invited him to serve as their pastor on conclusion of his recommenced academic course at Airedale College.

His father continued to seek Thomas' support at Bradford, but by November 1829 he felt sufficiently recovered to accept the proposed position as pastor of Howard Street, Sheffield. However he also felt it necessary to specify terms for his acceptance which made it clear that he was by no means confident that his affliction was only in the past. He completed his academic course at Airedale in June 1830 and took up his ministry at Howard Street, Sheffield on the second Sabbath in July 1830.

Sadly, in the following month his illness caused him to seek medical assistance and it was recommended that he take rest in the Isle of Man for a week. By late October 1830 he had returned to his congregation. Early on the 9th January 1831 he was taken alarmingly ill and *"every public effort was one of imminent danger to his constitution"*. He was never after able to undertake his duties in full. He was 23 years of age and wrote to a friend *"It may be that my life is verging fast towards its close"*

Eleven months after he was appointed to the position of pastor at Howard Street Sheffield, Thomas Rawson Taylor resigned on the 21st May 1831, having undertaken barely six months of uninterrupted labour. For only a short time

he also acted as classical tutor at Airedale College, but the failure of health which compelled him to leave Sheffield also necessitated his resigning his tutorship. He took refuge and a search for relief from his pulmonary affliction, consumption, with rest in the Isle of Man, accompanied by his father. He returned to Bradford still unfit but stronger and until early 1832 he busied himself with the publication of his sermons and the formation of the Mechanics Institute at Bradford.

About this time his mother, Mary Taylor became seriously ill and was not expected to survive. By March 1832 she had rallied, but she died two months later on the 18th May 1832. Reports of the time indicate that Thomas remained weak, but he was able to preach from his father's pulpit at Horton Lane and had been approached by the Dissenting College at Blackburn to act as their Classics tutor. Thomas declined the invitation because his illness was too great.

He was no better twelve months later in May 1833 and was persuaded to tour the Scottish Highlands for almost four months to benefit from the air in those localities. He returned stronger but still too ill to hold an office in the church. His father was now in his mid-60s and in poor health and Thomas continued to assist him by preaching from his father's pulpit in Horton Lane, Bradford. As late as November 1833 his abilities continued to be sought after and he was invited to become the Classical Tutor at the Independent College at Undercliffe.

On Saturday, 3rd January 1835 he travelled to home from Nottingham, and fatigued, he was taken ill in the night. He showed no improvement over the weekend, but determined to travel to Airedale College. On the 18th January 1835 he suffered "*alarming symptoms of bleeding from the lungs which returned with great violence*". He was no better a month later and he was certain that his life was ebbing away. Early on Sunday morning, 1st March 1835, the haemorrhage returned as his brother remained in attendance. His father was sent for, answering the call to be by his side. He survived the night but weakened over the following few days.

At a little before 5 o'clock in the afternoon of Saturday, 7th March 1835 Thomas Rawson Taylor, fell asleep. Just before 10 o'clock in the evening he died. He was 27 years of age. He was buried in the family vault in Horton Street Burial Ground, Bradford on Friday, 13th March 1835.

An obituary of Thomas Rawson Taylor appeared in the "*Bradford Observer*" on the 12th March 1835

Thomas Rawson Taylor – His Poems and Hymns

Much of the above detail of his life is taken from a volume of his "*Memoirs and Select Remains*", by W.S. Matthews, in which were also several poems and a few hymns, published in 1836. His best known hymn is "*I'm but a stranger here.*" This hymn was apparently written during his last illness. It was headed "*Heaven is my Home.*"

It is in all the editions of the Little Flock Hymn Book from 1856 to 1978. The rest in common use all from his *Memoirs*, 1836, are:

1. **Earth, with her ten thousand flowers.** *The love of God.*
2. **Saviour and Lord of all.** *Hymn to the Saviour.* Altered as "*Jesu, Immanuel*" in the *Leeds Hymn Book*, 1853.
3. **There was a time when children sang.** *Sunday School Anniversary.*
4. **Yes, it is good to worship Thee.** *Divine Worship.* From this "*Tis sweet, O God, to sing Thy praise,*"
5. **Yes, there are little ones in heaven.** *Sunday School Anniversary.*

"*The Story of the Hymns and Tunes*" by Butterworth, Hezekiah, 1839-1905; Brown, Theron, 1832-1914. Published 1906. This volume includes the words of "*I'm but a stranger here. Heaven is my Home*" and a fine tribute to the young Thomas Rawson Taylor. The tribute is reproduced below;

"The simple beauty of this hymn and the sympathetic sweetness of its tune made children love to sing it, and it found its way into a few Sunday-school collections, though not composed for such use.

A young Congregational Minister, Revd. Thomas Rawson Taylor, wrote it on the approach of his early end. He was born in Ossett, near Wakefield, Yorkshire England, May 9th 1807 and studied in Bradford where his father had taken charge of a large church, and at Manchester Academy and Airedale (sic) College. Sensible of a growing ailment that might shorten his days, he hastened to the work on which his heart was set, preaching in surrounding towns and villages while a student, and finally quitting college to be ordained to his sacred profession. He was installed as

pastor of Howard St., Chapel, Sheffield, July 1830 when only twenty-three. But in less than three years his strength failed, and he went back to Bradford, where he occasionally preached for his father, when able to do so, during his last days. He died there on March 15, 1835 (sic) Taylor was a brave and lovely Christian – and his hymn is as sweet as his life.

In his last attempt to preach, young Taylor uttered the words “I want to die like a soldier, sword in hand”. On the evening of the same Sabbath he breathed his last. His words were memorable and Montgomery, who loved and admired the man, made them the test of a poem, part of which is the familiar hymn “Servant of God, well done”

The words of “Heaven is my Home” belong to Thomas Rawson Taylor, but the tune was composed, much later, by Arthur Seymour Sullivan (1842- 1900). Later knighted, Sullivan is best known as one half of Gilbert and Sullivan but there was a time when he supplemented his income by working as a church organist and music teacher, and writing hymns and songs.

In all, Sullivan composed 74 hymns and, perhaps, the most enduring is “*Onward Christian Soldiers*”. Written by Sabine Baring Gould at Horbury Bridge in 1865, the hymn was adopted by The Salvation Army as their processional hymn.

Thus Sir Arthur Seymour Sullivan was the composer of works written by reverend ministers who, in the case of the Reverend Sabine Baring Gould preached at Horbury Bridge and, who in the case of the Reverend Thomas Rawson Taylor, was born in Ossett.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KlvOTdmJ5uU>

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- ⁸. Transcribed by Colin Hinson © 2014 from the Appendix to *Congregationalism in Yorkshire* by James C. Miall, 1868. <http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/YKS/Misc/CongChurches/WRY/Bradford-HortonLaneChapelCongChurch.html>
- ⁹. Thomas Taylor had seven children. Thomas Rawson Taylor (baptised on 25th May 1807 at Ossett); William (baptised at Bradford 31st August 1810. Died 30th March 1826); Mary (Baptised at Bradford 5th July 1813. Died June 1827); Lydia (Bradford 4th September 1814); George (Bradford 14th August 1817); James Samuel (Bradford 23rd November 1819). 7th child unknown.
- ¹⁰. The Congregational Church Magazine 1841, Volume 5.
- ¹¹. Sketch from *Memoirs And Select Remains of The Rev. Thomas Rawson* The same image is available at <https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Memoirs-and-remains-of-thomas-rawson-taylor.djvu/8>
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- ¹⁷. "Heaven is my Home (I'm But A Stranger Here)" words by Thomas Rawson Taylor 1835. Composed by Sir Arthur Seymour Sullivan. Sung by the choir of the Pilgrim Mennonite Mission. Video by S. E. Samonte, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KlvOTdmJ5uU>