

# HAZELWOOD SCHOOL – A CATALYST FOR REFORMATORY EDUCATION?

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## Abstract

Hazelwood School was established at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in Birmingham, by the Hill family. This paper argues that the ethos and unique practices adopted at the school by the Hills, together with their individual activities, which were influenced by a series of socially-minded individuals with whom they came into contact, can be seen as contributing to the choice of Birmingham as the location for the first national conference on the reform of juvenile criminals, held in 1851, and to the development of the reformatory and industrial schools that were later established to accommodate criminal children. Additionally, the efforts of successive generations of the Hill family, who continued to work to improve the treatment of neglected and criminal children, were so progressive that their influence extended beyond Victorian Britain.

In 1851 Birmingham hosted the first national conference on the reform of juvenile criminals (Barnard, 1857, p.307). Later legislative changes eventually abolished the jailing of children but why did Birmingham host this first conference? My research into juvenile crime in Victorian Birmingham has led me to examine Hazelwood School as being a potential catalyst for both this and the subsequent development of reformatory education.

Historians and educationalists have examined the school before, though only for its influence on mainstream education. The practical application of many of the subjects offered was noteworthy when compared to traditional teaching methods. Michael Sadler (1923, p.5) highlighted this and John Adamson (1930, pp.272-273) underlined the unusual diversity of its curriculum. R.L. Archer (1937, p.19) noted it was a 'remarkable' educational experiment and drew parallels with the school's use of punishment in a reformatory manner and the subsequent influence of Matthew Davenport Hill. H.C. Barnard (1961, pp.20-21) described the Hill family's contribution to education as 'outstanding', stating their school embodied some of the most modern and progressive educational principles. The institution's contribution to the development of education is clear but its place within reformatory education has not been specifically identified.

Hazelwood developed from an earlier school in Birmingham opened, in 1803, by Thomas Wright Hill (Hey, 1954, pp.19-20). Born at Kidderminster, in 1763, family acquaintances included reformers John Howard and William Wilberforce (Dobson, 1959, pp.261-262). An apprenticeship led Hill to move to Birmingham where he joined Joseph Priestley's congregation and later became a teacher in Priestley's Sunday School (Dobson, 1959, p.263; Hey, 1989, pp.22-23).

Upon opening his first school, Hill published details of the elements that drove his ethos and provided the foundation for practices that came to fruition at Hazelwood. These highlighted a spirit of kindness and co-operation, and the overriding importance of moral training. The exploitation of the particular interests and talents of each pupil, to bring the most out of them, was deemed vital (Hey, 1954, pp.19-20).

This system comprised three main elements, primarily designed to underpin discipline. Firstly, through the 'Hazelwood Assizes' – a court comprised of pupils – those accused of discipline breaches were judged by their peers (Dobson, 1960, p.5). The Laws of Hazelwood School amounted to over 110 pages, and detailed the penalties, or punishments, that could be imposed. These ranged from fines to imprisonment, as the school possessed a 'gaol'. A criminal register recorded all convictions (Hill. R. and Hill. F., (eds.), 1827, pp.40-49).

The second element saw the school day organised with military punctuality (Bartrip, 1980, p.51). From dawn, pupils started or finished tasks, such as dressing, eating or studying, to a bell rung by a monitor over sixty times a day (Dobson, 1960, p.5). Those failing to act promptly were fined, as was the monitor if he failed to ring the bell at the correct time. Music was also used as a prompt; the school had its own band and the pupils were described as moving with 'military order and exactness'. Underlining the efforts made to utilize the whole day, a newspaper was read aloud during supper (Kaleidoscope, 1825, pp.25-26; Public Education, 1827, pp.4, 52-53).

The final element involved using tokens, or marks, for rewards and punishments (Public Education, 1827, p.6). They acted as an internal currency and were earned for undertaking additional duties; such as serving at the 'Assizes', for exceptional pieces of school work and even prompt attendance at the thrice daily roll calls. They were used to pay any fines accrued but could be exchanged for treats.

The relevance of these elements is highlighted when compared with practices adopted at Saltley Reformatory. Opened in 1853 to accommodate convicted boys, it has been selected for comparison because it was also in Birmingham and Matthew Davenport Hill – the son of Thomas Wright Hill – played a significant role in its establishment (First Annual Report of the Birmingham Reformatory Institution, 1854, p.3). As illustrated below, the parallels that emerge are striking, particularly considering Hazelwood significantly pre-dated the reformatory.

A high level of discipline would be expected in such a penal establishment but Saltley's inmates actually had far fewer rules to adhere to than Hazelwood's pupils. It did, though, possess a 'jury', comprised of inmates, which was established by John Ellis, the first superintendant. It ruled on the punishments for those found breaking the rules and, as Ellis noted, frequently allocated stronger punishments than he felt necessary (First Annual Report of the Birmingham Reformatory Institution, 1854, p.7).

Bartrip (1980, p.51), when describing the amount of responsibility given Hazelwood's pupils, highlighted that, rather than allowing more freedom, they were actually restricted by such responsibility as it produced a 'bondage of regimentation'. This reflects the comments of Michel Foucault (1991, p. 293) when he described the early French reformatory at Mettray as combining the cloister, prison, school and regiment to produce a severe form of coercive discipline. The potential benefit of this when applied to Saltley's inmates may not have been lost on those who established the institution. Mirroring Hazelwood, an instrumental band was also established there. This practice was subsequently adopted by many comparable institutions and J.A. Hitchens (1903, p.37) later wrote that a majority of the British Army's regimental bands comprised former reformatory and industrial school boys.

A Hazelwood 'style' mark system was introduced at Saltley, it was also applied in factory schools and prisons (Stewart and McCann, 1967, p.236). Alexander Maconochie was a strong supporter of such schemes. A naval officer who governed the Norfolk Island penal colony between 1840 and 1844, he had proposed a similar system where inmates worked to earn marks in order to obtain anything from food to clothing or even their freedom (Maconochie, 1857; Moore, 2011, p.43). He first suggested this in 1837 and, according to a later headmaster of the school, Maconochie confirmed the idea was based on Hazelwood's scheme (Moore, 2011, p.41; Schools Enquiry Commission, 1868, p.846). In 1849, as Recorder of Birmingham, Matthew Davenport Hill appointed him as the first governor of the new borough gaol. Local justices permitted Maconochie to experiment with a modified mark system but it was unsuccessful and he was subsequently dismissed. (Stewart and McCann, 1967, p.237; Moore, 2011, p.45) Despite this, Hill credited Maconochie as being a major contributor to making the prison system more humane (Hill. M.D., (ed.), 1861, pp.213-240).

As mentioned earlier, the practices adopted at Hazelwood were influenced by a series of individuals who came into contact with the school or members of the Hill family separately. Jeremy Bentham was one. In 'Chrestomathia', he advocated education to be more practical than just based on the classics and suggested schools adopted 'scholar juries' and 'delinquent registers' to enable students to learn how to discipline themselves (Bentham, 1816, pp.14, 70, 120-127). He subsequently met Matthew Davenport Hill and recognised many of his proposals were already operating at Hazelwood (Harris, 1988, p.187). Bentham's support and influence raised the profile of the school.

Through Bentham, Henry Brougham became associated with Hazelwood and the Hills. A life-long advocate of education for the poor, he recognised its place in the prevention of crime (Stewart and McCann, 1967, p.242). He later worked with Matthew Davenport Hill to reform the treatment of child criminals and established the National Reformatory Union with Matthew's son Alfred (Hill. M.D., 1857, p.346; Hill. R. and F., 1878, pp.286-290) Together with Frederic, Edwin and Rowland Hill, also brothers of Matthew, Brougham founded the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK); an organisation which aimed to provide inexpensive educational material (New, 1961, p.351).

In May 1824, Robert Dale Owen, who became a renowned politician and social reformer in America, visited Hazelwood (Encyclopaedia Britannica; Hazelwood Magazine, 1824, pp.29-30). Owen had been educated at the school of Philippe Emanuel von Fellenberg at Hofwyl, in Switzerland, which was described as possessing a similar organisational style to Hazelwood, incorporating the teaching of philanthropic and humanitarian values (Donnachie, 2004). Later, the Hills recorded how, at Owen's suggestion, a number of changes were made to the school's management (Hill. R. and F., 1878, p.61).

Owen's father, Robert senior, was a Scottish mill owner who adopted a policy of philanthropic management. Regarded as one of the founders of infant education in Scotland, he also reduced his employees working hours and organised the village surrounding his mill into electing a jury which arbitrated on community disputes. He

was also an associate of Jeremy Bentham (Claeys, 2004). Rowland and Matthew Hill visited New Lanark in the 1820s (Gorham, 1978, p.134).

Four of Thomas Wright Hill's eight children became particularly influential. Matthew Davenport Hill was the first Recorder of Birmingham; effectively the head of the local judiciary, and the acknowledged pioneer of probation in Great Britain. Where possible, instead of jailing children, he remanded them into the care of suitable adults, most frequently their employer, and tasked the police to monitor their progress (Timasheff, 1941, pp.12-13; Tobias, 1979, pp.177-8). Together with Mary Carpenter, Hill also organised two further conferences in Birmingham on the subject of juvenile delinquency, in 1853 and 1861 (Hill. R. and F., 1878, pp.164, 174).

Another son, Rowland, though known for developing the modern postal service, was also involved with establishing the SDUK (New, 1961, p.348). He taught at Hazelwood and made a point of accepting boys with limited academic abilities or reputations for being troublesome (Hey, 1989, pp.96-97). In 1832 he published *Home Colonies*. Resulting from visits he had made to several continental 'pauper agricultural colonies', at the request of Henry Brougham, it described how the colonies occupants grew their own food and received an education. Said to alleviate poverty and reduce crime, Hill made an ultimately unsuccessful suggestion that they be established in this country (Hill. C., 1894, p.105). Their particular significance is that they mirrored the reformatory farm schools that were established later in Britain to accommodate criminal children.

Frederic Hill served as a prison inspector in Scotland where he suggested establishing an institution that children would attend upon completion of their prison sentences (Hey, 1989, p.41). There, they would be taught a trade, with which to support themselves, to ensure they did not return to crime. His proposal was never realised. In 1853 he described the importance of a family atmosphere and the use of exercise in the rehabilitation of children. He also recommended using old ships to train boys to be sailors; such training ships were introduced two years later (Second Report of the Inspector Appointed to Visit Reformatory Schools, 1859, pp.36-37). He is attributed as influencing reformatory practices in America and it was said his portrait hung on the walls of the Elmira Reformatory in New York; the significance of this particular institution will be highlighted shortly (Hill. C., 1894, pp. 280, 284, 321).

Edwin Hill was one of the lesser known of Thomas' sons. He taught woodworking, practical engineering and metalwork at Hazelwood but also had his own opinions on crime prevention. He was particularly concerned with schemes that targeted the adults who benefited from the crimes of children and presented several papers to the Social Science Association on the subject (Hill, 1868; 1871).

The reforming activities of the Hill family continued into the next generation, mainly through the children of Matthew. They became involved with child welfare and continued work to improve the treatment of juvenile criminals. Alfred, his Hazelwood educated son, was involved in managing reformatories in Smethwick, Saltley and Warwick, as well as Gem Street Industrial School, Birmingham (Lowes, p.41).

By 1852, Matthew's daughters Florence, Rosamund and Joanna were working in Bristol with Mary Carpenter to raise awareness of child poverty there (Gorham, 2004;

Manton, 1976, p.115). Rosamund later joined the Industrial Schools' Committee for the School Board of London and raised the plight of disabled juvenile criminals (National Association of Certified Reformatory and Industrial Schools, 1894, p.189). Florence campaigned to improve the standard of industrial training provided for girls placed in workhouses (Hopkins, 1882, p.144). Joanna formed part of the management of Smethwick Reformatory alongside her brother Alfred and was a visiting justice at Birmingham gaol, as well as a magistrate in the city (Lowes, p.103). She also managed a 'boarding-out' scheme for children in and around Birmingham; this saw children from workhouses placed with 'suitable' local families (Hopkins, 1892, p.151).

However, the influence of Hazelwood and the Hills was not confined to this country or the nineteenth century. In the 1870s, Florence and Rosamond Hill were credited as developing a pioneering scheme of boarding-out children in Australia. They worked with their cousin Emily Clark, daughter of Caroline Hill; herself the daughter of Thomas Wright Hill, who emigrated in the 1850s (Gorham, 2004; Gorham, 1978, pp.141, 146). Earlier, in Sweden, in 1830 a school based on Hazelwood's educational practices was opened with the assistance of former pupil Edward Levin. Hillska Skolan survived for sixteen years (Stewart and McCann, 1967, p.121).

The Hills views were particularly popular in America. The 1870 National Congress on Penitentiary and Reformatory Discipline, held in Ohio, included papers by Edwin, Frederic and Matthew, as well as his daughter Joanna (Wines (ed.), 1871, pp.105, 110, 394, 574). The American reformer Thomas Mott Osborne used some of the principles expressed by Matthew as a framework for reforming the American prison system at the beginning of the twentieth century (Hey, 1854, p.289).

Earlier, in 1895, Osborne had worked with William George to establish the George Junior Republic. This institution, which still survives, took troubled children from New York's poverty-stricken tenements to an area in the countryside which was effectively run as a mini-republic (Holl, 1969, p.55; Hull, 1897, pp.73-74). Reflecting the practices at Hazelwood, it had its own laws and the children themselves judged those who transgressed its rules. It possessed a prison and all were required to work to earn 'Republic money', a variation on the mark scheme, to buy anything they required there (Holl, 1969, pp.48-50; Hull, 1897, pp. 77-78).

In 1869, New York's legislature established the Elmira Reformatory, where American prison reformers Enoch Wines and Gaylord Hubble implemented a new system designed for the rehabilitation of young criminals. Both they, and the commission behind the legislation, acknowledged the influence of the ideas of Frederick and Matthew Davenport Hill (Wines, 1895, pp.192, 197, 200; Winter, 1891, pp.3-4). The particular significance of this is that the Elmira system was the model for the Borstal system in this country, which replaced the Victorian reformatory and industrial schools (Forsythe, 1991, pp.15, 46-47); this creates a unique situation where the ideas of the same group of individuals influenced both the development of the Victorian system and the system that replaced it.

Some of the practices found at Hazelwood School were clearly transferrable to the later reformatory and industrial schools developed to accommodate delinquent children. It seems that the school's ethos made it an epicentre which absorbed ideas

about social reform. Though Hazelwood was originally shaped by the Hills, some family members developed a social conscience that shaped their adult lives and prompted an almost generational campaign to improve the lot of criminal and neglected children. Not only did they influence contemporary institutions but also, nearly a century later, the work of the Hills was being used as a guide for penal reform in the United States. Clearly Hazelwood's influence was greater than its role as the catalyst for the development of reformatory education.

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### **Biography**

Now in the final year of my PhD at the University of Birmingham, researching juvenile crime in Victorian Birmingham, I have had articles published in the journals *Warwickshire History* and *History West Midlands*. I have commenced teaching undergraduates and will also be contributing to the MA (West Midlands History) course.