

Dr R W Dale

Theologian, Pastor, and Preacher | Dale and the Civic Gospel | Dale and Carrs Lane today | Dale's statue

Pastor of Carrs Lane Church 1854-1895

Theologian, Pastor, and Preacher of the Civic Gospel

Robert William Dale was born in 1829. He came to Birmingham in 1847 to study at Spring Hill Congregational College. He had already shown a gift for preaching, and was to earn a gold medal in the London University MA examination.

His potential was quickly recognised by **John Angell James**, pastor of Carrs Lane Chapel, who frequently invited him to preach there. Despite doubts and criticism and some disagreement over theology, there was a mutual affection and respect between Mr James and Mr Dale, who, in June 1854, accepted the Church's invitation to become co-pastor. Mr James died in 1859, confident that the ministry at Carrs Lane was in capable hands.

In October 1859 R W Dale became sole pastor, and established over the years an excellent world-wide reputation for Carrs Lane. He was best known as a preacher, and openly read his sermons because 'if I spoke extemporaneously, I should never sit down again'. His last sermon was preached over 45 years after the first, on February 10th 1895.

Dale's Congregationalist principles may be summarised as:

- Christ is present with any group gathered in His name
- The priesthood of all believers
- Faith in Christ is the only condition of membership

Dale did not use the title 'Reverend', although he became Dr Dale in 1883 when Glasgow University conferred the degree of Doctor of Laws on him.

Dr Dale and the Civic Gospel

Dr Dale was known as a proponent of the 'civic gospel'. He welcomed social improvements such as the extension of the franchise and trade union representation.

He believed that "the public business of state is the private duty of every citizen" and he entered forcefully into the civic life of Birmingham. He influenced Joseph Chamberlain's work for municipal reform. He was especially interested in education and in dealing with the fundamental causes of poverty and crime.

At a time of aggressive imperialism, Dr Dale showed a keen awareness of foreign affairs. His political activity was an important part of his Christian ministry, but he never introduced purely party politics into the pulpit.

His magnificent personality stimulated those around him to take up the work of Christian citizenship or to work within the Church to spread the Gospel and to help those in need. The life of worship found its fulfilment in many forms of voluntary service.

Like his predecessor, Dr Dale took a great interest in Spring Hill Congregational College, Moseley; and it was largely due to his initiative that the College, renamed Mansfield College after its founders, was moved to Oxford in 1886. (The Spring Hill buildings were taken over by Moseley School). He remained Chairman of its Council during its first difficult years there.

In 1868, he became Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, and in 1891, President of the International Congregational Council.

His work on 'The Atonement' was delivered as a series of lectures at the Memorial Hall in 1875 and published that year. It is so well regarded in some circles that it is still available



from **Quinta Press**, as is his 'Manual of Congregational Principles'. Towards the end of his life, he wrote some of his best work, notably 'The Living Christ and the Four Gospels'.

A reproduction of a wood engraving of Dr Dale preaching in Union (Congregational) Chapel Islington can be seen on the National Portrait Gallery website by clicking **here**. Then click on the Previous button above the picture to see an excellent 1865 photograph of Dale, aged about 36. (Both pictures can be seen enlarged.)

Dale House which is part of the Church Centre is named after him. But the nearby street called Dale End was there well before him!

How the Dale tradition expresses itself in Carrs Lane today

Dr Dale's ethos still lives on in the way Carrs Lane Church seeks to respond to the needs of the people of Birmingham:

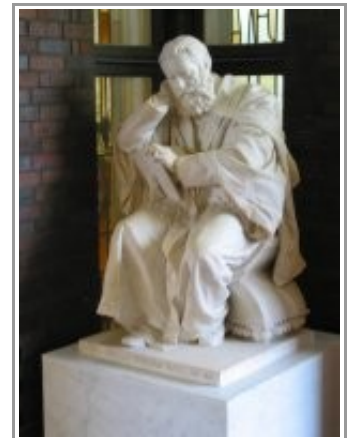
- A modern Church Centre, designed to be more accessible and user-friendly to today's society
- Informed worship, a monthly Healing Service, and an informal lunch-time service each Wednesday
- A Quiet Room for prayer and meditation
- The Counselling Centre, providing a professional service to those in need, and dealing with an increasing number of referrals from statutory agencies
- The Fair Trade Shop, providing fairly traded products from Third World Countries
- Carrs Lane Homes, a sheltered housing scheme in Acocks Green for 70 elderly residents

The Dale Centenary

1995 was the centenary of Dr Dale's death. During the year a number of celebratory events took place at Carrs Lane, and a series of lectures was given in Birmingham and Oxford. These were published by the URC History Society under the title: *The Cross and the City: essays in commemoration of Robert William Dale 1829 - 1895*; edited by Clyde Binfield. Birmingham Civic Society agreed that the Blue Plaque (above) commemorating Dr Dale be put on the outside of the church, facing the site of the church in which he preached.

Dr Dale statue

During this year of commemoration, the statue of Dr Dale (right) was re-discovered in a Birmingham City Council warehouse. It now stands on the main foyer at Carrs Lane.



Find out more about the Dale statue