

Abbott, Edwin

(1808–1882)

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- <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/14>
 - Published in print: 23 September 2004
 - Published online: 23 September 2004
 - This version: 24 May 2007

Abbott, Edwin (1808–1882), headmaster, was born in London on 12 May 1808, the son of Edward Abbott, an oilman and Italian warehouseman, of St Martin's Lane, London, and his wife, Charlotte. After his family fell on hard times Abbott entered the Philological Society of Marylebone, Middlesex, in 1818, which had been established as a library in 1792, and became a charity school under influential Anglican patronage in 1797. Admission was limited to 'necessitous' sons of the middle classes 'reduced by accident or misfortune'. During his time as a pupil, and, later, as monitor and junior assistant, the school experimented with the Pestalozzi system and ceased corporal punishment. He left the school in June 1822, but returned as master *pro tempore* late in 1826. He was confirmed as headmaster of the renamed Philological School of General Instruction in 1827 with a salary of £100 a year, which rose to £500 before his retirement in 1872.

Abbott greatly increased the reputation and prosperity of the school, which in 1857 was rebuilt along Gothic lines at New Road, Marylebone. He expanded the curriculum to include English, German (from 1840), and science (electricity 1854; chemistry 1870). In 1834 the school established ties with the newly founded King's College, London, and became a feeder for the City of London School. Abbott's letters reveal a firm but humane disciplinarian. His rule was 'a child's first duty is obedience to those who are in authority over him; and if he does not learn this, everything which he does learn is more likely to do him harm than good' (to Mr Chapman, 7 July 1859, headmaster's letter book, 2, Westminster Archives).

With D. Walther, printer, Abbott in 1841 published a translation of volume 3 of J. H. Merle D'Aubigné's *History of the Great Reformation* (3 vols., 1838–41). He also published *A Second Latin Book* (1858). Ahead of his time in teaching English, he wrote *A Handbook of English Grammar* (1845; 3rd edn, 1877), and *A Concordance to Pope* (1875), edited by his son [Edwin Abbott Abbott](#). The groundwork for the latter's famous work *Flatland* (1884) was laid by his father's *Handbook of Arithmetic and First Steps in Algebra* (7th edn, 1876).

Abbott married his first cousin Jane Abbott (1806–1882) on 25 June 1831. They had eight children: Jane (1832–1859); Elizabeth (1834–1880); Charlotte (1835–1884); Anne (*b.* 1837); Edwin Abbott (1838–1926); Edward (1840–1859); Alice (*c.*1841–*c.*1892); and Sydney (1844–1887). Elizabeth married, in 1857, [John Humffreys Parry](#), serjeant-at-law, a sympathizer with the moral-force Chartists, and a former pupil and close friend of Abbott. The latter was moved by the 'condition of England' question and maintained friendships with leading Christian socialists. As churchwarden of Christ Church, Marylebone, Abbott supported the appointment of John Llewelyn Davies to the rectory. Abbott's daughter Alice married Davies's curate, Richard Haworth Hart (1830–1888).

Abbott died at 18 Palace Square, Upper Norwood, Surrey, on 27 May 1882, shortly after the death of his wife on 22 April. They were both buried in Kensal Green cemetery, Abbott on 31 May. Described by *The Times* (31 May 1882) as 'a most efficient and popular member of the educational profession', his influence over the St Marylebone High School for Boys (as the school was renamed in 1901) extended long after his death; two succeeding headmasters, William Moore and Charles Houseman, were brought up as master and boy under him.

Sources

- The Times* (31 May 1882)
- The Times* (13 Oct 1926)
- E. McNeal, *The Philological School, 1792–1954* (1954)
- E. Parry, *My own way: an autobiography* (1932)
- private information (2004) [osb]T. Banchoff[csb]
- d. cert.
- CGPLA Eng. & Wales* (1882)
- DNB*

Archives

- City Westm. AC, letters as headmaster

Likenesses

- portrait, 1845, 38 New Road, Marylebone, London; formerly at St Marylebone School
- C. Armytage, 1872, 38 New Road, Marylebone, London; formerly at St Marylebone School

Wealth at Death

£748 10s. 7d.: probate, 27 June 1882, *CGPLA Eng. & Wales*