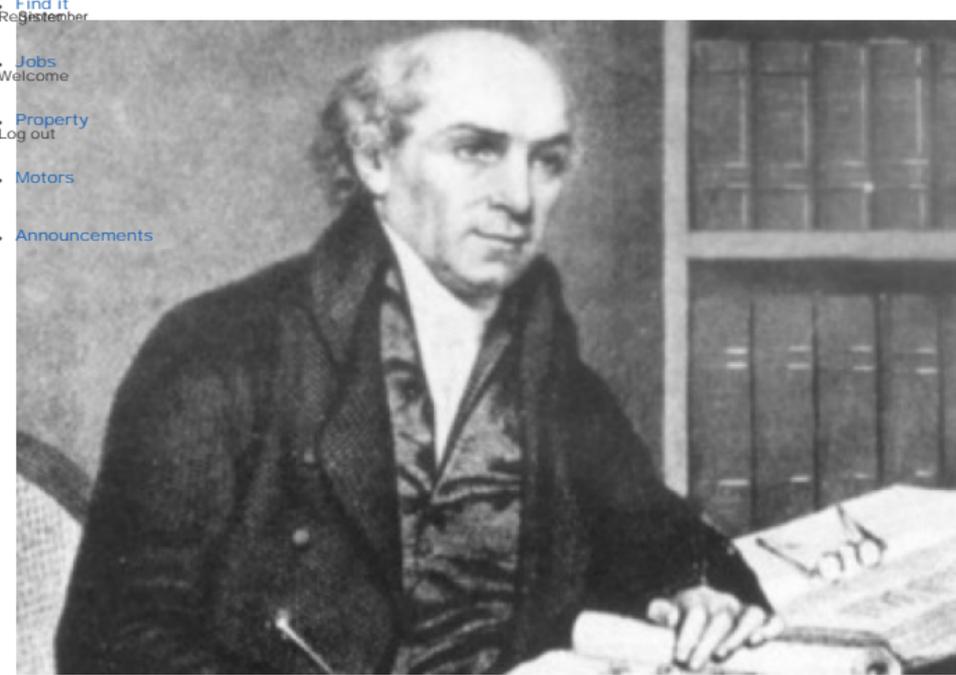


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The lasting legacy of an inspirational missionary

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William Carey

Published on Wed Aug 17 10:11:06 BST 2011

“Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God”.

This Biblical quote was to become William Carey’s most famous epigram and a guide for how he was to live his life.

William Carey was born in Paulespur, Northamptonshire, on August 17, 1761, to relatively poor parents.

He was a bright child and attended school until the age of 12, then becoming an apprentice shoemaker.

A fellow apprentice, a dissenter called John Warr, had a huge impact on Carey’s beliefs and he began to join Warr at an Independent Congregational Meeting House in Hackleton.

In 1783, at the age of 22, he was baptised in the River Nene at Northampton.

Two years later he became the pastor of the Baptist Church in Moulton.

He received a meagre income which he supplemented by continuing to make shoes as well as through teaching.

He often did work for shoemaker Thomas Gotch. Carey would walk to Kettering every two weeks with shoes for Gotch and return with leather to make his next pair.

It was his sponsorship from Gotch that enabled him to study languages, including Greek, Hebrew, Dutch, Italian and French.

He would dream of travelling the world and read the tales of great explorers including Captain Cook.

Over the next few years Carey began to preach more and more about the need to spread the Gospel throughout the world.

It was during a sermon in Nottingham in 1792 that he delivered his now famous quotation from Isaiah 54:1 and 2 – “Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God”.

His message was well received, but the men hesitated when they were called to action.

His friend Andrew Fuller, a Baptist preacher in Kettering, suggested they meet again in October to discuss setting up a mission society.

That meeting took place in the back parlour of Widow Wallis’ home, called Gospel Inn, which is now a home for the elderly called Carey Mission House.

The 14 men assembled agreed to form the Baptist Missionary Society. Fuller passed round his snuffbox to collect financial pledges of support, which amounted to £13 2s 6d.

Carey had little money to contribute but when a volunteer was invited to become the first missionary, he stepped forward.

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In June 1793, Carey, his wife Dorothy and their three children set sail for India on board the Danish ship Kron Princess Maria.

Five months later – during which time Carey learned Bengali – they arrived in Calcutta. Carey would never return to England.

His mission to spread the word of the Gospel was not well received at first and it was seven years before Carey found his first convert, an Indian carpenter called Krishna Pal, who was willing to be publicly baptized.

Carey went on to become a professor of Bengali, Sanskrit and Marathi at the Fort William College in Calcutta, training young men for the Indian civil service.

His passion for social justice led him to campaign for the abolition of 'sati' (widow burning), female infanticide and the burning alive of people with leprosy.

Having set up the first printing press in India, he translated the Bible into many Indian languages. He also translated Indian classical literature and traditional stories as well as publishing the first newspaper in Bengali.

His passion for education led to schools being set up – for boys and girls – as well as the establishment of Serampore College, the first college in India to teach a wide range of subjects to students of every "caste, colour or country" and to train people for ministry in the growing church in India.

Carey's interest in botany led him to found the Agro-Horticultural Society of India and to produce books on both science and natural history.

Carey's work had a huge influence on many future missionaries, including anti-slavery campaigner William Knibb, who left Kettering in 1824 for Jamaica where he founded churches and schools and played a major role in liberating slaves.

Carey spent the rest of his life in India, where he refused to allow any setbacks to detract him from his life's work.

He said of himself: "I can plod. This is my only genius. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything."

He died in 1834 aged 72.

Mark Craig, of BMS World Mission, originally Carey's Baptist Missionary Society, said: "William Carey's achievements are towering and his legacy endures today in the Indian nationals continuing his work in the country that he loved and in the society he founded.

"Carey's model of mission was new, countercultural at the height of Empire, and wonderfully powerful.

"His lifetime's commitment to the Indian people and to the gospel mean that his name is still held in high regard across the subcontinent."

Today a commemorative plaque will be unveiled at the site of Carey's baptism in the River Nene, followed by a special service tonight at 7pm at the Carey Baptist Church in Moulton to celebrate Carey's life.

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