

*from the Archive*

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### Sunday schools in Reepham

*By Janet Archer*

The December photograph shows the performers from the Sunday school in a Nativity Play held in St Mary's Church in the 1950s, which includes Mrs. McCubbin, the then vicar's wife, in the centre.



An additional photograph, shown below, shows a more formal, smaller group on the same occasion. Identification of some of the individuals can be found on the Reepham Archive website.



Sunday Schools began to be established in the 18th century to provide basic lessons in literacy, as well as religious instruction for children who were often working alongside their parents on six days a week. Robert Raikes, a Gloucester journal editor, is credited with establishing a successful Sunday school for poor and orphaned children in July 1780. As word of his work spread, Sunday schools soon appeared in other communities throughout England.

In Reepham in the 1920s every denomination ran a Sunday school, St. Mary's and St. Michael's, Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodist, Salvation Army and the Plymouth Brethren. Even parents who did not attend church thought that their children should attend Sunday School.

The Wesleyan Methodist Church had its own purpose built schoolroom, added to the church in 1904. Lessons were held prior to the Sunday morning church service where the children would join later with the adult congregation, followed by another session in the afternoon.

There would usually be a summer treat, possibly to the seaside, and a Christmas treat. Another important event was the Sunday School Anniversary where the children would give recitations and songs and be presented with prizes for good attendance.

In Wesley Piercy's time in the 1920s the Sunday School Anniversary was in July. "A platform was erected in the Chapel, on which sat all the Sunday School scholars and teachers and the choir. All the children had to give a recitation; no recitation, no treat. These were some of the biggest occasions of the year. All three chapels followed a similar pattern and were always packed on these occasions, when ladies could show off their new hats."