

Robert Behoe Radcliffe 1796-1832

Robert Behoe Radcliffe was vicar of St Helen's for just four years, between 1828-1832. A large monument on the west wall of the Church (pictured below) remembers him thus:

Sacred to the memory of the Revd Robert Behoe Radcliffe MA. Late fellow of King's College, Cambridge, and four years vicar of this parish. He died the 26th of August 1832, aged 36 years.

He was descended from an ancient family, possessed a singular nobleness of mind and sweetness of disposition.

He was an earnest and affecting preacher, a faithful expounder of the word of truth and adorned by his life the doctrine which he taught.

Proving more especially that God was with him by the patience with which he endured the extreme sufferings of body which brought him to an early grave.

His ministry here, though short, was abundantly blessed and that his name may be remembered, when those who heard his voice are sunk to dust, this monument is erected by his parishioners.

This slab bearing the original inscription replaces that which suddenly fell on June 14th 1918.



There are references to the earlier monument in *Pigot's Gazetteer* (1838)¹, which describes it as "the most interesting of the monumental piles is that erected in the chancel, in 1833, by the parishioners, to the memory of the Rev Robert Behoe Radcliffe, MA, the late excellent vicar of Ashby." *The British magazine & monthly register of religious and ecclesiastical information*. Volume 7 (1835)², adds that it is "a florid cenotaph, affectionately designed to honour that simplicity of life and doctrine for which their truly excellent pastor was pre-eminently distinguished."

Robert Radcliffe was baptised on 14th August 1797 at St Paul's Church, Covent Garden, the son of Kemeys and Mary Magdalana Radcliffe. Kemeys Radcliffe was born in Hackney in 1766 and married Mary Magdalana Tealing of Putney at St Paul's, Covent Garden, on 21st April 1792.

¹ Google Books

² Google Books

Robert certainly had one older sister, Emilia Anne, born in May 1795 and named after her Aunt, Emilia Anne Pond, who was a witness to Kemeys' and Mary Magdalana's wedding.

Kemeys Radcliffe was a banker until around October 1812, when the *London Gazette*³ lists him as a bankrupt. The *Imperial Calendar*⁴ records that Kemeys Radcliffe was working in the Navy Pay Office between 1814-1816, but there the trail goes cold.

Robert was a bright boy. He entered Eton College on 14th August 1808, as a King's Scholar⁵. He would have passed the College Election exam and been awarded a Foundation Scholarship for admission to a house known as 'College,' at the heart of the medieval school buildings. King's Scholars were – and still are – between the ages of 13-18 years and represent the original core of the school founded by King Henry VI as a charity school to provide free education to 70 poor boys who would then go on to King's College, Cambridge, which Henry VI founded as a sister institution in 1441.⁶

Robert duly entered King's College Cambridge in the Autumn of 1816 as a scholar from Eton. He graduated with a BA in 1821 and an MA in 1826. He was a College Fellow from 1819-1829.⁷

In April 1822, Robert was ordained Deacon and in March 1823, he was ordained priest. Both ordinations were performed by the Bishop of Ely at St George's Church, Hanover Square. What he did between 1823 and 1828 is as yet unknown, but he was licensed as perpetual Curate of Smisby on 1st May 1828, resigning the post on 27th May 1831. No reason is given for this, but it could have been due to his ill health. He was instituted as vicar of Ashby on 25th June 1828, a role which ended with his death in 1832. Both posts were in the gift of George, the 2nd Marquis of Hastings, to whom Radcliffe was also Private Tutor and Chaplain.⁸

Little information has come to light about other aspects of Robert Radcliffe's life, other than that he was a first-class cricketer in the 1810s, presumably at school and during his university years. His unusual middle name, Behoe (sometimes spelled 'Beehoe'), came from his maternal uncle, Behoe Tealing, who rose to the rank of Chief Mate in the East India Company and died in service at around the time Robert was born. As a vicar, Robert was clearly much loved, being described after his death as an 'excellent' vicar, with a 'simplicity of life and doctrine.'

Robert died at Leamington Priors on 26th August 1832, after a long, unspecified, illness. Leamington was then extremely popular as a Spa town, having grown rapidly in the 18th Century due to the reputed medicinal qualities of its waters. Robert may have gone there to take the waters in an attempt to improve his health. He is buried at St Nicholas Church,

³ FindMyPast – Caledonian Mercury, 29th October 1812, reporting from the London Gazette.

⁴ FindMyPast – Britain, Royal and Imperial Calendars 1767-1973

⁵ Eton College archives. The Headmaster's Entrance Book shows Robert's signature on entry – 14th August 1808.

⁶ Wikipedia – King's Scholars

⁷ Ancestry-Cambridge University Alumni, 1261-1900

⁸ Clergy of the Church of England Database

Kenilworth. As well as the monument in St Helen's, there is a memorial in the Chancel of St Nicholas, erected by his Eton friends and a large monument in the churchyard there, in an area near the church reserved for clergy.

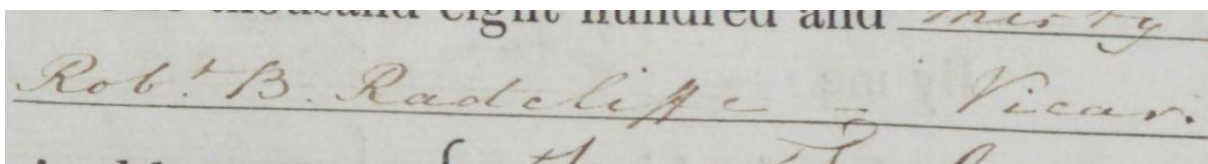


Memorial in the Chancel of St Nicholas Church, Kenilworth.

Photo: Simon Starkey

Robert's father and sister had died four years earlier, on 7th July 1828. Their deaths are recorded in *Baldwin's London Weekly Journal* of 19th July 1828⁹, which reads: "*Kemys Radcliffe, Esq, aged 62 years; and on the same day, under the same roof, his only surviving daughter, Emilia Anne Radcliffe.*" They may have been victims of a cholera pandemic which swept the world between 1826-1837.

The Greater London Burial Index¹⁰ lists the death of a Mary Radcliffe in August 1826. She was born in 1766 and died aged 60 years. She was buried at St Andrew's Church, Holborn. It's possible that this was Robert's mother.



Robert Behoe Radcliffe's signature as officiating priest in the St Helen's Church Marriage Register. 1831.

⁹ FindMyPast-newspaper archive. *Baldwin's London Weekly Journal*, 19 July 1828.

¹⁰ FindMyPast

It's a sad ending to a life which began with great promise. The son of a relatively poor family who attended Eton & Cambridge, played first class cricket and became a much-loved vicar, lost close family members in quick succession and suffered a long illness leading to his own early death. It may be some consolation to know that he was remembered with great affection by both his parishioners in Ashby and his fellow scholars at Eton.



Monument in the churchyard of St Nicholas, Kenilworth.

It reads: Sacred to the memory of Robert Beehoe Radcliffe. Late fellow of King's College, Cambridge and vicar of Ashby de la Zouch in the County of Leicestershire, who died at Leamington on the 26th day of August in the year of our Lord 1832. Aged 36 years.

Photo: Simon Starkey

Julie Starkey

St Helen's Church Heritage Project. May 2021. Revised May 2025.