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# Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

## Raffles, Thomas

(1788–1863)

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**Raffles, Thomas** (1788–1863), Congregational minister, the only son of William Raffles, a Baptist and a solicitor (*d.* 1825), was born in Princes Street, Spitalfields, London, on 17 May 1788. Thomas's sister, Mary (*d.* 1858), later married the judge James Baldwin Brown (1790–1843). His cousin was Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. His mother was a Wesleyan and he was brought up in that body. In 1800 he was sent to a boarding-school at Peckham run by a Baptist minister and attended the church pastored by William G. Collyer. For a short time in 1803 he was a clerk in Doctors' Commons but in October 1803 returned to Peckham to prepare for the ministry. Between 1805 and 1809 he studied at Homerton College under Dr Pye Smith. He declined a call to Hanover Street, Long Acre, but settled at George Yard Chapel, Hammersmith, and was ordained on 22 June 1809. On the sudden death of Thomas Spencer of Newington Chapel, Liverpool, Raffles was invited to succeed him. He began his Liverpool ministry on 19 April 1812, and moved on 27 May to the new Great George Street Chapel which had been built to accommodate Spencer's swelling congregation. Raffles married on 18 April 1815 Mary Catherine Hargreaves of Liverpool. They had a daughter and three sons, two of whom became Liverpool worthies in their own right: Thomas S. Raffles, his father's biographer and the town's stipendiary magistrate, and William W. Raffles, a cotton broker. Their daughter, Mary Rachel (1817–1887), was married by Raffles to a cotton broker, Samuel Marshall Bulley (1811–1880), on 9 August 1838; their children included the cotton broker and gardener Arthur Kilpin Bulley, the promoter of women's education Amy Bulley, and the historian Ella Sophia Armitage.

Under Raffles the Great George Street Chapel grew rapidly and by 1841 his salary was £700 per annum. He at once began to occupy a leading role in Liverpool and Lancashire Congregationalism: he was known as the 'patriarch' of the body in Liverpool, where his influence was compared to that of Thomas Binney in London. A whig by principle he played no part in party politics except in the affairs of the Liverpool Slavery Abolition Society. In 1833 he declined an offer to succeed Rowland Hill at the Surrey Tabernacle, London, preferring to minister in the urban and rural chapels of Lancashire.

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He was chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1839. On 19 February 1840 his Liverpool chapel was destroyed by fire, the day after it had been insured. A new building was quickly erected. Raffles was secretary of the Lancashire Congregational Union from 1826 to 1843. In 1816, in co-operation with the solicitor George Hadfield, he had promoted the Blackburn Academy for the training of ministers, and in 1843 saw to its successful removal to Manchester, as the Lancashire Independent college. He was chairman of the college education committee from 1839 to 1863. In the controversy over Samuel Davidson he took the conservative side, and was himself a moderate Calvinist. The Raffles scholarship and Raffles Library were founded at the Lancashire Independent college as a tribute to him in 1861. He had received an Aberdeen LLD in 1820 and a Union College, Connecticut, DD in 1830.

In Liverpool evangelical circles Raffles was well known, serving, among other causes, the Seaman's Friend Society, the Religious Tract Society, the Amicable Book Society, the Bible Society, Liverpool Infirmary, and the Liverpool Lunatic Asylum. His friendships were extensive: he was on good terms with Cardinal Wiseman and donned the white surplice over his cassock when he preached in Anglican pulpits. He was a great collector of original manuscripts relating to the history of nonconformity in Lancashire: these were subsequently used by Robert Halley and Benjamin Nightingale in their histories. He collected, too, vast numbers of autographs—forty volumes in all. He was also a poet and hymn writer, publishing in 1853 his own supplement to Watts's *Psalms and Hymns*. His *Original Hymns* were published posthumously in 1868 with a preface by his son-in-law, J. B. Brown. Josiah Conder chose one of Raffles's hymns for inclusion in his 1836 *Congregational Hymn-Book*. Besides his verse compositions and his translation of Klopstock's *Messiah* (1814), Raffles published his *Memoirs of Thomas Spencer* (1813), *Letters during a Tour through France, Savoy, etc.* (1818), *Lectures on Practical Religion* (1820), *Lectures on the Doctrines of the Gospel* (1822), *Hear the Church! A Word for All. By a Doctor of Divinity, but not of Oxford* (1839—a riposte to Pusey), *The Divine Command: a Jubilee Sermon to the London Missionary Society* (1844—interesting in that it produced a premillennialist backlash), *Internal Evidence of the Inspiration of Scripture* (1849), and *Independency at St Helens* (1856). He edited a new edition of John Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible* (1815). He died at his home at Edge Hill on 18 August 1863 and was buried at the Liverpool necropolis, on 24 August.

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## Sources

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T. S. Raffles, *Memoirs of Thomas Raffles* (1864)

B. Nightingale, *Lancashire nonconformity*, 6 vols. [1890–93], vol. 6

*Raffles centenary celebrations* (Liverpool, 1912)

G. S. Veitch, 'Thomas Raffles of Liverpool', *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, 9 (1924–6), 100–21

G. F. Nuttall, 'Autograph letters collected by Thomas Raffles', *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, 21 (1971–2), 21–5

JRL, Raffles Collection

## Archives

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BL OIOC, corresp., MS Eur. D 742

DWL, letters and papers

JRL, autograph collection, corresp., notes relating to Lancashire nonconformist churches, and sermons

NL Scot., corresp.

## Likenesses

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T. Blood, stipple, BM, NPG; repro. in *Evangelical Magazine* (1812)

I. Jackson, marble bust, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

D. J. Pound, stipple, BM, NPG

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J. Thomson, stipple (after Mosses), BM, NPG; repro. in *Imperial Magazine* (1822)

portrait, repro. in Raffles, *Memoirs*

## Wealth at Death

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under £8000: probate, 7 Oct 1863, *CGPLA Eng. & Wales*

### Archive Edition

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### See also

Brown, James Baldwin, the elder (1790–1843), judge and writer

Raffles, Sir (Thomas) Stamford Bingley (1781–1826), colonial governor and founder of Singapore

### External resources

Bibliography of British and Irish History <[http://cpps.brepolis.net/bbih/incoming.cfm?odnb\\_id=23009](http://cpps.brepolis.net/bbih/incoming.cfm?odnb_id=23009)>

National Archives <<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/c/F47539>>