

Thomas Babington Macaulay

Thomas Babington Macaulay was a famous 19th century historian, writer and reforming politician. He was born in 1800 in Rothley Temple (now Rothley Court Hotel), where his uncle and aunt lived. His father Zachary was a prominent evangelical Christian and activist for the abolition of slavery. As a child Tom Macaulay often came back to Rothley. From an early age he was a precocious and avid reader, especially in history and later Latin and Greek. He was an outstanding student at Cambridge.



Macaulay entered parliament in 1830 as a reforming Whig, and spoke in favour of the ending of civil disabilities for Jews, and for parliamentary reform in the debate about the Great Reform Act. When he went to India as a member of the Governor's council he wrote a famous – or notorious – 'Minute on Education'. Its main proposal - to make English the language of educated Indians – was based on Macaulay's dismissive, arrogant attitude to Indian languages and cultures. By contrast he thought European culture, and in particular classical literature the pinnacle of human achievement. This attitude was widely held in Britain at the time and has led Macaulay to be widely criticised (although he also has some Indian defenders, who have praised his criticism of the caste system). In India also played an important part in drafting the Indian Penal Code.

On his return to Britain Macaulay became famous as a poet, in particular for the *Lays of Ancient Rome* and *How Horatius kept the Bridge*. He wrote a multivolume history of the 1688 ('glorious') revolution which described it in glowing terms as the victory of parliament and liberty over royal despotism. He was an advocate of the National Portrait Gallery and became a founding trustee. In 1857 he was made the first Baron Macaulay, of Rothley. He died in 1859 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Even though many of his views may now seem outdated and narrow-minded he was undoubtedly an important figure and his birthplace at Rothley surely deserves to be marked by a Green Plaque.

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