

## Stoke Prior Reformatory Farm

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Ryefields farm on Shaw Lane was the site of Stoke Prior Reformatory Farm. The reformatory was founded in 1853 by Joseph Sturge a wealthy Quaker, philanthropist and campaigner for abolition of slavery. Joseph and his brother bought the farm and added dormitories and workshops. Worcestershire magistrates sent boys aged 10 to 15 years to the reformatory who would otherwise have been sentenced to prison. The reformatory originally housed 50 boys but this was later expanded to 80 and then 90.



Joseph Sturge

Joseph Sturge took an active interest in the school and was instrumental in introducing less harsh disciplinary methods than were customary at the time. Joseph died in 1859 and management of the school was taken over by his brother Charles who later passed the management to his son also called Joseph. Eventually running of the farm was taken over by a management committee.

At first the reformatory had problems in finding suitable staff and the boys often absconded. In 1903 the school hit the headlines when 60 boys ran away one evening. The Bromsgrove police were summoned and over the next two days all absconders were caught and returned to the farm.

Thereafter conditions improved and the reformatory acquired a good reputation. An inspection in 1911 found it to be well run with clean premises. There was a fife and drum band and sports teams which competed with other local teams. The boys were given a classroom education and trained to work in agricultural or industrial occupations. Many worked on the school farm or on neighbouring farms while some learned occupational skills such as carpentry, shoemaking or tailoring, Subjects taught in class included composition, recitation, mental arithmetic, geography, history and singing.

The reformatory finally closed in 1925. None of the original buildings remain except for the headmaster's house which stands on Shaw lane at the entrance to the farm.

The Parish Council have placed a plaque with pictures and some information about the reformatory on the grass verge outside of the house.