The History of Bromsgrove Cemetery

The Cemetery Lodge

A sketch by John Cotton of the old cotton mill, which was managed by John Adams. It was on the site that is now known as Watt Close

Rev. Thomas Houseman

John Adams Memorial

At the central point of the Cemetery was the Cemetery Cross (see front cover), erected to the memory of John Adams, who died on 17th January 1886, by his nephew Rev. Thomas Houseman, incumbent of Catshill, and Dr. John Day Collins (see No. 1 on the walk), headmaster of Bromsgrove School, who contributed a third of the cost. The design was by William Prosser who had been involved with the restoration of St John’s church, working with George Gilbert Scott. The Memorial was built from four differing coloured stones in a strong Victorian style. The steps are red Corshill sandstone, the columns are grey Forest of Dean sandstone, and the base, superstructure, and cross are Bath Stone. On the base were the four symbols of the Apostles, the name and death date of John Adams, the date of consecration of the Cemetery and text from 1 Corinthians xv 55. The inscriptions on the pediment are: on the South, a small Latin cross with the motto of the Emperor Constantine in this sign shall thou conquer; on the East, Alpha and Omega interlaced beneath I am the Resurrection and the Life; on the North, IHS (the first three letters of the Greek word for Jesus) beneath Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; on the West, XP (first and second letters of the Greek name for Christ), beneath I am the Way, the Truth, the Life.

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In December 1855 a meeting was held in the Town Hall to decide whether a new burial ground should be provided. The vicar, the Reverend Mr Villiers was in the chair; the proposal was made by Mr George Dipple and seconded by Mr A. Huxley. A Burial Board was subsequently set up and in May 1856 it was decided to purchase six acres of glebe land from the Dean and Chapter of Worcester, which had previously been leased to the Baroness Windsor. The architect chosen was C.H. Cooke of John St., Bedford Row, London. The building work was done by Mr Walker of Evesham and the groundwork by Messrs Cole and Sharpe, for the total sum of just over £2,504. Burials were discontinued in St John’s churchyard and in the Baptists’, Wesleyans’ (Methodists), and Independent burial grounds on 31 December 1856. Bromsgrove Cemetery was consecrated by the Bishop of Worcester in January 1858, with many of the local clergy attending. Berrows Journal reported “A number of persons had congregated to witness the ceremony but principally the labouring classes and children”. The new cemetery was laid out in the latest fashion with paths running mostly at right angles. It was praised by the Journal of Civil Engineers and Architects, 1858. The lodge had extremely striking features in red brick with Bath stone dressings, roofed with red and blue tiles in bands. The lodge was replaced in 1958 but the lych gate remains.

John Adams 1766-1858

John Adams was born at Ashby de La Zouch and was apprenticed to a Leicester hosier. It was in Leicester in 1788 that Adams’ sister, Jane, met and married a young clergyman from Lancaster called Robert Housman. At this time the leading hosiery of Leicester were experimenting with new spinning machinery based on Arkwright’s Water Frame. Major industrial disturbances in Leicester in 1788 persuaded one hosier, John Colman, to spin his yarn well away from Leicester. He sent his young partner, John Adams, to Worcestershire to manage the spinning frames in Bromsgrove’s former cotton mill. There was no opposition to the new machinery in Bromsgrove and the mill was to employ 150 men and women, making John Adams the largest employer in the town. The remains of the huge mill are now a part of Bromsgrove’s Sands Park, (see No. 6 on the walk).
1. Rev Dr John Day Collis 1816-1879
Born in Ireland, he was ordained in 1843 and became Headmaster of Bromsgrove School. He served Bromsgrove as a JP and chairman of the Poor Law Guardians. He was a founder of the Literary and Scientific Institute in the town and spearheaded the Anti-Truck movement to improve the railers lives. He pressed for George Gilbert Scott’s improvements to the church and for the Hop Pole, now Tudor House, to be rebuilt in New Road, where it is today. Plot no. F4, SO556707082.

2. Elijah Walton 1832-1880
A Birmingham born artist and author, he studied at Birmingham School of Art and the Royal Academy Schools, London. Walton spent several years travelling and painting in the Alps, Egypt and the Middle East, and became an early member of the Alpine Club. Walton and his second wife moved to Bromsgrove, where she had family connections, and Elijah was for a time President of Bromsgrove School of Art. He died at his home in Bromsgrove, leaving three young sons. Plot no. J226, SO556707084.

3. Sir Thomas Chavasse 1854-1919
A great benefactor of Bromsgrove and a generous supporter of the building of the Cottage Hospital. He was for 30 years senior surgeon at the Birmingham General Hospital and to the Bromsgrove Cottage Hospital. Plot no. E57, SO556707086
The memorial plaque is to Noel Chavasse RAMC. VC and bar MC, his nephew, who died in 1917.

4. The Sanders Family
Thomas Tudor Sanders 1809-1881
The son of Benjamin Sanders, a button manufacturer, he ran his father’s business. In 1865, he inherited the Cotton Pool Estate and later drained the enormous pool, of which a small pool now remains in Sanders Park (see map on rear cover).

Benjamin Hadley Sanders 1830-1910
The son of Thomas Tudor Sanders. He was articled to a solicitor in London and became a partner with Luke Minshall, solicitor of Steps House, St John’s Street. He was Clerk to the Improvement Commissioners, and subsequently to the Local Board and the Urban District Council, resigning in 1903. He founded the Bromsgrove Rovers FC. He demolished the cotton mill and built the first open air swimming pool in the town. When he died at Oakdene, Kidderminster Road (now the Conservative Club), the town’s people erected a horse trough and drinking fountain in the High Street in his memory.

Lucy Mary Maude Sanders 1861-1945 & Mary Beatrice Sanders 1865-1951
The two daughters of B.H. Sanders never married and like their father showed great generosity and a well developed social conscience, donating Sanders Park to the town. Plot no. 1274, SO556707090

5. Thomas White 1819-1908
As a young man he obtained a position with John Adams as a clerk and four years later he was taken into partnership. When John Adams died Thomas took over the ingo works. He was a teacher in the Sunday school and a treasurer of the Church Missionary Society. He was a trustee of the Bromsgrove United Charities and donated to the Cottage Hospital Fund. He built the Cottage Homes in New Road to provide houses for twelve “financially deserving ladies.” Plot no. 1407, SO556707087

6. The Scroxtont Brothers
John Harris Scroxtont 1804-1890
Born in Bromsgrove, the eldest son of John Scroxtont, Baptist preacher. Author, poet and amateur artist, he was a stationer and bookseller, editing ‘The Gleaner’, Bromsgrove’s first newspaper. From his premises in the High Street he sold and took some of the first glass plate photographs. He was remembered as “one of the best and kindest of men.” Plot no. D144, SO556707090

John Scroxtont 1811-1888
Born in 1811, he was a nail factor with a warehouse in St John’s Street. He was later in partnership with Walter Brooke of Raglan House, High Street. Thomas built Alma House, standing on the corner of Church Lane and Kidderminster Road, which became Bromsgrove’s Vicarage in 1933. He died there on 30th May 1888. Plot no. D169, SO556707090

7. William Crane 1844-1916
A baker by trade, he established a business in Melbourne Road, Sidemoor. He succeeded his father as Leader of the Methodist Ebenezer Chapel in 1866. From 1905 he became increasingly paralysed by illness and his son, Ashwell, became Deputy Leader to carry out many of his duties. Plot no. D18, SO556707083

8. Samuel Saywell 1837-1914
Headmaster of the College School, founded by his brother Lemuel. His school was in the High Street but with the opening of New Road he moved the school to The Green, a large house halfway up the hill from the town. It became known as the College, now Elmshurst, and gave its Reader in Mediaval Archtiology. It became a Fellow of the Linnaean Society and the Royal Astronomical Society. In 1872 he was awarded a BA from Trinity College Dublin and two years later an MA. He served on the Worcestershire Education Committee and was involved in the life of the Church and the Court Leet. Plot no. T80, SO556707096

9. John Humphreys MA PhD, MDS, FLS, FSA, FGS 1850-1937
He left school at 15 and was apprenticed to a chemist. He opened his own shop in Bromsgrove when he was 21. He then studied dentistry at the Dental Hospital in Birmingham and opened a surgery in Bromsgrove in 1877. He was the first to be awarded a Master of Dental Surgery from Birmingham University in 1901. He was the captain of the local Fire Brigade and a member of the Court Leet. He became a Fellow of the Linnean Society, the Society of Antiquaries and the Geological Society. He was President of The Birmingham Natural History and Philosophy Society and an Associate of the Royal Geographical Society. He was President of The Birmingham and Worcester Archaeological Societies. Plot no. V232, SO556707106

10. The Cotton Brothers
John Cotton 1844-1934
An architect, historian, poet and artist. He was responsible for many of the buildings we see today in and around Bromsgrove, including All Saints Church and St Godwaldf’s Church at Finstall. He left an archive of his drawings and his historical scrapbooks to Birmingham Reference Library. Plot no. M198, SO557007094

William Alfred Cotton 1853-1889
Auctioneer and scholar and brother of John. He wrote a history of Bromsgrove Church and many pamphlets on with and tokens, flint chips and the geology of the area. His library of books was accepted by the Victoria Institute in Worcester (later the Public Library). Plot no. M199, SO557007094

Born in Birmingham he was a successful musician, composer and entertainer. During the Second World War he was working in an engineering factory and this gave him time to invent a game. This game became known as Cluedo (or in America, Clue), believed to be the second most popular game after Monopoly. Cluedo has sold more than 150 million copies in more than forty countries and inspired a television series and the film “Clue” (1985). Plot no. B86, SO557007094

12. Thomas Davies Thomas
He was born in Bithul Wells, Breconshire in 1831. From 1835 he ran a drapery business in a three-storey Georgian house near the corner of High Street and St John’s Street. He was a director of the Gas Company and a Commissioner named in the Bromsgrove Improvement Act of 1866. He later became General Manager of the Stourbridge and Kidderminster Bank, whose Bromsgrove branch is now occupied by HSBC. He died at his house in Denbighshire, leaving £81,000. Plot no. E290, SO556707084.