

Number
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The Harborne Society

NEWS

Special Issue **GREAT MEN OF HARBORNE**

THE GREAT AND GENTLE DAVID COX

By *MADLINE ASTON* President *The Harborne Society*

"The Great and Gentle David Cox" so described by Thomas Priest the author of *Harborne Once Upon a Time: David Cox* — classified in the census returns of 1851, under the heading miscellaneous trades as an Artist & Landscape painter, was born in 1783 and this year we are celebrating the bi-centenary of a

very famous Harbornite.

In his youth, David Cox born in Deritend had little chance for specialist education in art. His father was a blacksmith noted for his fine craftsmanship, but not in a position to further the boy's obvious talent for drawing. David was appointed to a firm making buttons, buckles

and snuffboxes. Later he moved to a firm of locket and miniature painters and when the owner of that firm died, he became colour grinder and general assistant to the scenery painter of the Birmingham Theatre.

But by 1804 he had become disillusioned with the theatrical life and decided to go to London and further his ambition to become a landscape painter. This he did. In 1805 he exhibited at the Royal Academy. In 1808 he married Miss Mary Ragg, the daughter of his landlady and they set up house at Dulwich Common where in 1809 his son David Cox junior was born. His work progressed but he had to continue teaching, giving private lessons and as drawing master at a Military College in Fernhem and later at a girls school in Hereford.

He was in Hereford from 1814 to 1827 when he moved back to London. He was by this time well known and admired and his work was being exhibited and sold but not for high prices, rarely more than £20 for a set of drawings. The highest price he ever got was £100 for 'The Sea-shore at Rhyl' painted 1855. So the teaching had to continue until his son David became qualified as a teacher and was glad to take over his father's pupils and leave him free for his real work and to retire to Harborne.

David Cox came to Harborne in 1841 and took up residence at Greenfield House in Greenfield Road to be near two of his closest friends and admirers both of whom lived in Harborne. Mr. Charles Birch of Metchley Abbey was a man of taste and a well known collector of paintings and Mr. William Roberts, a man of position in Birmingham's business circles and a fellow artist of merit; both these gentlemen had known and respected David Cox for many years.



DAVID COX Painter 1783 - 1859

(*Photograph of portrait
by courtesy Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery*)



GREENFIELD HOUSE Harborne

They settled down quickly into the local Harborne community. The painter was free to give all his time to his painting, to develop his new interests in oils and to enjoy the friendship of local artists. He settled into a routine of painting in the mornings and again in the afternoons with friends and colleagues coming in the evenings for discussions.

The garden at Greenfield House, although much shorter than it was — in 1841 it stretched down to High Street — can still be recognised as that which David and his wife cultivated.

The routine was broken for shopping expeditions into Birmingham (with a boy to carry the purchases) or for visits to the poor or sick of the village. David Cox never painted on Sunday and he and his wife attended St. Peter's Church regularly. From Harborne

with friends he made many excursions for painting, most of all to Betws-y-Coed for the Welsh mountain scenery he loved.

In 1843 he had his first serious illness and in 1845 his wife died. This was a great loss for as well as being a most efficient housewife she was also a critic, a mental stimulus which he prized. His work continued and it is recognised by many that between 1846 and 1856 some of his best work was done although in 1853 he suffered a slight stroke.

In 1855 his friends and admirers arranged to present him with his portrait and they commissioned Sir John Watson an eminent Scottish Academician to paint the portrait. Sir John wouldn't come south of the border so David Cox with his son and a friend travelled to Edinburgh for five sittings. The portrait, which pleased everyone

except David Cox himself was presented on November 19th 1855 at Metchley Abbey by Mr. Charles Birch who was the Chairman of the Committee.

The portrait was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1856 and then hung in Greenfield House until Cox's death in 1859. From there it went to The Birmingham and Midland Institute and is now in the Birmingham Art Gallery. Engravings in Mezzotint were made by Samuel Bellin and copies given to all those who had subscribed. One of these came into the possession of The Harborne Society two years ago and is on permanent loan to the Library in High Street.

After Christmas 1858 David Cox suffered a bad attack of bronchitis. He rallied, but by early June his resistance was very low and it is said that one night on his way to bed he stood and looked at the pictures in his parlour and said: "I shall not see you any more." And he did not. On the morning of June 7th he died, quietly and peacefully in the presence of his son David, his housekeeper and a servant.

He was buried with his wife in Harborne Churchyard mourned by his friends and admirers and by the Harborne people who had grown to respect and love him.

A committee was again formed to consider a fitting memorial and Mr. Hollins, a local sculptor of some repute was commissioned to make a portrait bust for the Art Gallery and Mr. Powell for Messrs. Hardman to design and execute the stained glass window in Harborne Church.

To celebrate the bi-centenary of the birth of David Cox the Birmingham Art Gallery is mounting an exhibition of his work. This will be a major exhibition occupying several galleries and consisting of approximately 150 oils, watercolours and engravings drawn not only from the Birmingham Collection but from other public and private sources. It will also have a section "David Cox the Man" where portraits, letters, pictures of houses in Hereford and Birmingham and personal memorabilia, will be displayed. The exhibition opens on July 26th and closes on October 14th. From Birmingham this exhibition will be transferred to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

We, you, surely all of us must see it.

THOMAS ATTWOOD MP SOCIAL REFORMER

By WILLIAM CURR

If you had been walking by the Grove Park on a certain day just over a hundred and fifty years ago, you might have been astonished to see a crowd of working men milling through the gates and making their way up the drive to the house. This was not — as you might have supposed — a riotous mob on its way to make violent and destructive protest at one of the homes of the well-to-do, but a group of politically concerned workers come to summon their Tory friend, Thomas Attwood, to address a mass meeting of the Trades Unions. So impatient were they for the presence of Attwood — who was recognised as a great speaker — that it is said they would not wait for the harnessing of his horses, but themselves pulled his carriage the four miles from the Grove to Newhall Hill (where Newhall Street now stands). The crowd assembled there has been estimated at two hundred thousand, and is said to have been the largest public meeting ever held in Birmingham before or since.

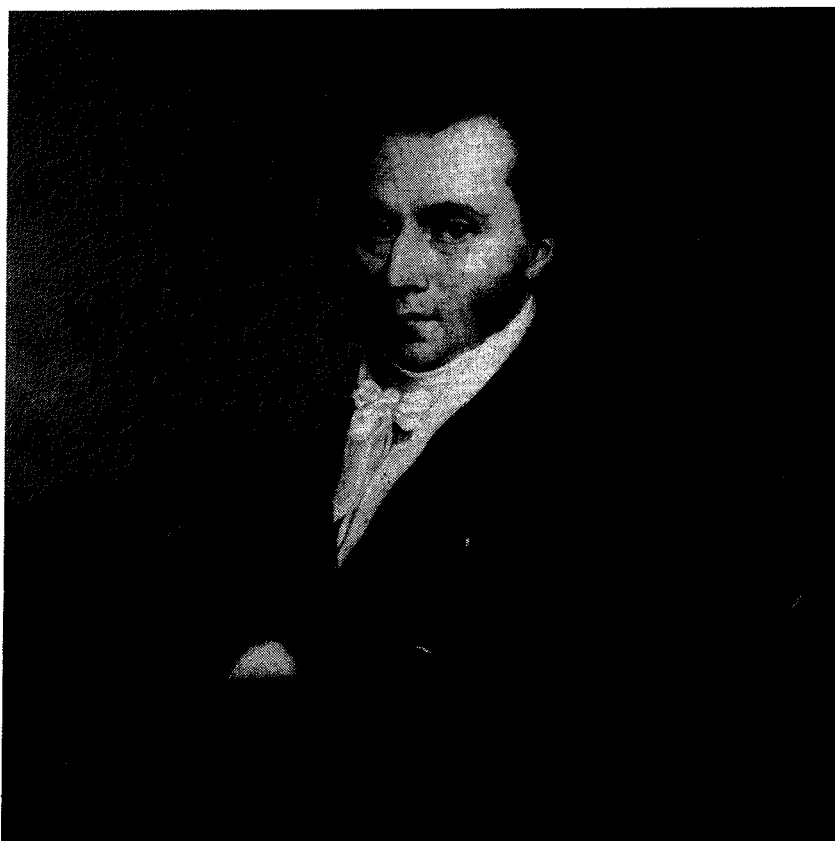
Attwood had for years been campaigning for economic and political reform. In January 1830, he had formed in Birmingham a "Political Union for the Protection of Public Rights" (the Constitution was said to have been drafted in one of the rooms at the Grove). The Union was described as "a great alliance of the middle and working classes" and Birmingham's example was followed in other towns all over the country (many of them — like Birmingham in the early 1830's — totally unrepresented in Parliament).

The aims of the Unions were economic as well as political. Attwood's experience as a banker (he was a partner in the bank of Attwood and Spooner) made him a determined advocate of economic reform. He regarded deflationary monetary policies as potentially disastrous "resulting in employers having to dismiss workers and contract their output" (a view which strikes home forcibly in 1983!) and the currency reforms introduced on his advocacy were said to have saved the country from imminent bankruptcy in the

1820's. While living at the Grove he published many letters and pamphlets on the economic history of Great Britain. Himself the son of a wealthy and influential family — his father was a banker and steelmaker — Thomas Attwood had been married in 1806, at St. Peter's, Harborne, to the Harborne heiress Elizabeth Carless, daughter of William Carless of the Ravenhurst. At the same time he enjoyed enormous popularity among the artisans of Birmingham who, as an expression of admiration and affection, had presented him with a silver cup, purchased from the proceeds of a "penny collection", which had raised £300 — an enormous sum for the early nineteenth century.

During the two years prior to the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832 many demonstrations and meetings were held in Birmingham,

and Thomas Attwood spoke at most of them — but he was no advocate of violent reform; at the great meeting on Newhall Hill he told his huge audience: "The sword must not be drawn in England. The terrible knell of the tocsin must not sound. The tears of the widow and orphan must not mark our course. Without blood, without anarchy, without violation of the law, we will accomplish the most glorious reformation recorded in the history of this world." From Newhall Hill, Attwood went on to London where, after an unsuccessful attempt in 1831, the Reform Bill was passed in 1832. Jubilant celebrations were held in Birmingham. Attwood was made a Freeman of the City of London, and his journey home to the Grove was a triumphal progress through villages where flowers were strewn before him and evergreen arches erected across the road. When on 12th December, 1832, Birmingham was granted two seats in Parliament, it was no surprise that Thomas Attwood was elected unopposed as



THOMAS ATTWOOD M.P. 1783 - 1856

(Photograph of portrait by courtesy Birmingham Reference Library)

one of Birmingham's first two M.P.s.

This year, to mark the bicentenary of Attwood's birth, various celebrations will be held in Birmingham, and the Harborne Society

hopes to erect at the Grove a plaque as a reminder that a man once described as "The most influential man in England," "a key figure in getting the Reform Bill passed", once lived there.

Economist, reformer, man of peace, Thomas Attwood well deserves to be remembered in Harborne, where he spent twenty-three of his most dramatic and productive years.

THOMAS ATTWOOD BICENTENARY EVENTS

October

- 3rd Start of Exhibition at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
- 3rd Start of Exhibition at Birmingham Central Lending Library, Readers' Lounge.
- 2nd Commemorative Service at Halesowen Parish Church 6.30 p.m.
- 3rd 6.30 p.m. } Attwood Lecture at the Birmingham and Midland Institute
- 6th 11.00 a.m. }
- 8th Grand Trade Union Procession and Rally at Larches Green, Sparkbrook 3.00 p.m.
- 9th Hymn Picnic in Grove Park, Harborne under the auspices of the Harborne Council of Churches 3.00 p.m.
- 9th Commemorative Service at St. Peter's Church, Harborne 6.30 p.m.
- 13th Readings from Thomas Attwood's speeches etc. at The Birmingham and Midland Institute 11.00 a.m.
- 16th Civic Service at St. Philip's Cathedral, Birmingham 3.00 p.m.

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

This year we are celebrating the anniversaries of two great men of Harborne and I am particularly pleased that The Harborne Society is able to pay this tribute to them. It is very easy for us all to beaver away at our house and garden completely oblivious of the community we belong to, its history and environment. It is timely, therefore, to think about this Harborne that we share with David Cox and Thomas Attwood.

Since their time at Greenfield House and The Grove, Harborne has seen many changes, including the demolition of the latter and a present threat to demolish the former. But throughout these changes the character of Harborne has remained as a quiet English town on the outskirts of an expanding city. Since 1960 we in The Harborne Society have been increasingly involved in trying to preserve and foster this character through its buildings, its community organisations and its people. At the start six objectives were laid out and these are, in order:

- 1) to encourage the spirit of community
- 2) to promote interest in the character and history of Harborne
- 3) to represent the interests of

Harborne and its immediate neighbourhood to Civic and other Authorities

- 4) to put forward proposals for the future of Harborne's environment
- 5) to encourage suitable conservation
- 6) to oppose unsuitable development.

"Spirit of community" is a nebulous and difficult concept to define but this does not apply to the ways in which it is encouraged. Regular meetings, social events, working on projects together, "community" based publications, are all proven ways tried by this Society and many others.

That is why we have produced this Newsletter, at some considerable cost, to encourage a pride in our community, its character and history. Much more can be done in line with our first two objectives through exhibitions, pamphlets, town trails and seminars and we are determined to make a start as soon as possible.

Through The Civic Trust, the Victorian Society and cooperation with neighbouring societies we have sought to make the voice of Harborne known nationally and locally. We regularly meet both councillors and officers of the City Council and after many

years we can now say the same of the County Council. It is important to stress that The Harborne Society is not trying to supplant the local councillors but to supplement their efforts on any issues with which they require help. It is not a matter of "good luck" or "strings" that we are consulted by the planners and developers. It is by putting forward practical suggestions, by talking (sometimes endlessly!) around a table and showing a consistent maturity in negotiations that we have achieved their respect as a valuable partner in Harborne's development.

Elsewhere you will read of our efforts to encourage conservation and discourage the wrong type of development, so I will not elaborate here. I will say that through our reports, our newsletters and our regular press reports we have managed to make people aware that Harborne is a community and needs their time and effort in order to stay that way.

Harborne is proud of its two famous sons and I trust that through the work of The Harborne Society we may always be proud of our community past but particularly present.

Yours


Chairman

HARBORNE NEWS

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TECHNICAL COMMITTEE WORK 1982-83

By *ANDREW PEET* Chairman Technical Committee

The last year has seen a tremendous amount of work for the Committee. In some areas we have moved forward, in others there has been no progress. Indeed, in some areas we seem to have moved backwards!

The pressure to redevelop Harborne, from the City, the County, property companies and individuals, continues unabated. In the last year your Committee has received over 50 planning applications for consideration. Most of these have been investigated and more than half were commented on by the Society. These applications are in addition to proposals by the City as part of the Local Plan and from the County by way of traffic schemes.

We appear to be no further forward with the site between Serpentine Road and Ravenhurst Road, owned by The King Edward Foundation. It is particularly ironic that in its Centenary year, the Foundation possesses such an eyesore in one of Birmingham's more pleasant suburbs. The Society has drawn the attention of the appropriate parties to the unauthorised uses on the site and is pressing for its speedy redevelopment. This site has been declining for many years and should not be allowed to deteriorate further.

The City Housing Department wants to demolish 25-35 Greenfield

Road, part of the Harborne Quadrant. A letter requesting reasons for the demolition has so far met with a resounding silence. However, I like to think that with the help of the Harborne Society, the demolition of the rest of the properties has been averted and improvement grants have been awarded to residents. Nevertheless, we must continue to be vigilant — planning permission is not required to demolish these properties and such things have a nasty habit of happening early on Bank Holiday Sundays!

The Princes Corner story continues. It seems that the County Council proposals for wholesale demolition of the shops and construction of a dual carriageway have foundered due, I would suggest, to strong local opposition and budget cutbacks. The Harborne Society suggestions for a modest scheme appear to have been heeded although detailed proposals contained in our Princes Corner Report as far back as 1981 have been largely ignored. The only people not to acknowledge receipt of the Report, from MPs to newspapers, were the County Council Engineering Department! However, as a result of our strong objections to the traffic orders posted around Princes Corner, your Chairman and I met two representatives from the County Council and discussed their proposals in detail. We sub-

sequently expanded our comments in a second letter and we now await the decision of the Highways Committee.

In essence, the County Council scheme provides pelican crossings, new road markings, a reshaped island and some alteration to kerbs. A bus layby is planned for the 3 and 11 just before the Swimming Baths. We are keeping an eye on the proposals for signs and landscaping — objections have been made in advance to the pelican crossing guardrails! We eventually hope to persuade the developers of the King Edward site to incorporate a bus layby between Serpentine Road and Ravenhurst Road, removing the bus stop from the island, a major cause of traffic congestion.

The Harborne Local Plan. After many years of discussion with the City Planners, a situation was reached where the Society refused to withdraw their objections to three of the proposals contained in the Plan. These were the demolition of the railway bridge in Park Hill Road, the future of the vacant site above St. John's Church, and the planners' scheme for splitting the High Street into retail and non-retail — the mysterious core and non-core areas.

The result was a Public Local Enquiry, held at the Council House on 1st and 2nd March before an Inspector from the Department of the Environment. One interesting point that emerged on the High Street proposals was that the City Planners were seeking formal approval for a policy they had been operating, unknown to anyone, since 1969! This policy has had precisely the effect we were predicting for the future — the concentration of non-retail uses (banks, estate agents, building societies etc.) in the older, more traditional area of the High Street. At the time of going to press the Inspector's Report had been received by the City Planners. The Report will now be placed before the Planning Committee as soon as possible. All will then be revealed!

Finally, in stating that the last year has been a busy one for the Technical Committee, I cannot foresee any let up in the year to come. We must maintain a constant vigil to protect the village we all know and love, and I welcome any information or help that members of the Society are prepared to offer to the Technical Committee.



PRINCE'S CORNER Under threat?

COMMITTEE MEMBERS 1983-84

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Hon. Treasurer:

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and

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HAIRDRESSING

PROGRAMME FOR 1983-84

1983

September 7th, Wednesday, St. Peter's

Birmingham's 2000 Listed Buildings — Mr. Alan Crawford B.A., B.Lit. Chairman of the Victorian Society.

September 18th, Sunday afternoon 2.30 p.m.

A Guided Visit of the David Cox Exhibition at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

October 4th, Tuesday, Onneley House

Question Time — D.I.Y. queries answered by experts.

November 9th, Wednesday, St. Peter's

The Planning of the Central I.T.V. Programme Schedule — Mr. Barrie Wood B.A. Deputy Programme Planner.

December 6th, Tuesday, Onneley House

Harborne, The Making of a Suburb — Mr. Stuart Davies B.A., Ph.D., A.M.A. Department of Local History, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

1984

January 14th, Saturday, St. Peter's Church Hall

New Year Party, 7.00 p.m. — 11.00 p.m.

February 7th, Tuesday, Onneley House

Urban Rehabilitation — The Birmingham Way — Mr. William Reed M.C.D., B.Arch., R.I.B.A., M.R.T.P.I. Birmingham City Architect.

Late February, Place and exact date to be arranged.

Annual Dinner.

March 14th, Wednesday, St. Peter's

Morris Dancing - A Talk and Demonstration — The Jockey Men's Morris Club of Birmingham.

April 10th, Tuesday, Onneley House

The Francis Brett Young Story — Mr. Jo Hunt, Administrator, The Birmingham and Midland Institute.

May 9th, Wednesday, St. Peter's

Annual General Meeting. The Life of a Lord Mayor — Councillor Peter Hollingworth J.P.

July — To be arranged

Summer Outing.

Note: All meetings commence at 7.30 p.m. unless otherwise stated.

Cut along here