

Memorials in Holy Cross church– the Morson memorial

Sometimes in an idle minute in church, I look through the visitors' book to see who has been spending some time in Holy Cross. This summer, a couple had written that they had been looking for the memorial and grave of one of their Morson ancestors.

The memorial is large enough: a fine stained-glass window at the far end of the chancel. This has three illustrations of the theme of resurrection, and underneath, the coats of arms of Jesus College, Oxford, and Cowbridge Grammar School. The brass plate states that the 'window was erected, in memory of Revd James Collin Francis Morson, Headmaster of Cowbridge School, by past and present boys'.

Revd JCF Morson was headmaster of the Grammar School from 1870 to 1875. A Londoner, from an army family, he had been educated at Jesus College, with which of course Cowbridge School had strong links. He was appointed assistant master at the school in 1865, and then became headmaster on the retirement of Revd Thomas Williams in 1870.

Iolo Davies in his book *A Certaine Schoole* claimed that Morson was destined 'to carry the School to heights of academic distinction never known before, or since'. During the relatively brief period of his headmastership, twenty-six boys went on to Oxford, twelve of them – commemorated in the Honours Boards which now grace the sixth-form building on Aberthin Road – gaining scholarships or exhibitions (and only five of them at Jesus College).

In addition, Morson's brand of 'muscular Christianity' saw the birth of rugby football at Cowbridge. The game which had developed in the great public schools of England seems to have been brought to Cowbridge by Morson, and it grew so successfully that in 1874 the school entertained Cardiff Rugby Club for the latter's first away fixture. Little is known about the match except that Cardiff were victorious; the return journey, by coach and four, was noteworthy in that the Cardiff coachman was too drunk to drive, a player took over the reins and managed to demolish the turnpike gate at Ely and to collide with a lamp post in St Mary Street! Cowbridge rugby blossomed so that by 1880 two of its pupils played for Wales while still schoolboys.

James Morson also played an active part in getting the relatively new school buildings repaired and kept in good condition ("the pipework in the house is so bad that it must be repaired before the winter"), and he also had the cottages opposite the school repaired (these were where four new houses are now being built).

Like many a headmaster before him, Morson took services in Holy Cross and acted as a de facto vicar of Cowbridge. He was a good preacher, and he had a volume of his sermons published. Like others, he too applied for the living of Cowbridge, but his attempts were frustrated, not surprisingly, by Revd Thomas Edmondes, the Rector of Llanblethian with Cowbridge, who lived at Old Hall. The latter would have seen his income and his influence diminish had a separate parish been created for Morson.

Sadly, James Morson died in 1875 (26th April) at the age of thirty-two. He had been negotiating to buy Leys Cottage in Llanblethian, but his widow moved to 81 High

Street in Cowbridge. Of their three children, the youngest, John, became ordained and served as a curate in the parish of Llanblethian with Cowbridge and Welsh St Donats from 1898 to 1900.

*Footnote : Morson bought properties now occupied by 25 to 29 Eastgate in 1874
(source – deeds of 27 Eastgate)*

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