



THE WAYFARER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ADAM LINDSAY GORDON COMMEMORATIVE COMMITTEE INC.



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ISSN 1834-4070
ISSN 1834-4089

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WESTMINSTER ABBEY SERVICE: COMMEMORATING AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL POET

The highlight of the recent trip to the UK was the service held on 27 October at Westminster Abbey where the bust of Australia's national poet, Adam Lindsay Gordon sits amongst the immortal poets of the Empire.

The service for Westminster Abbey began soon after our arrival in the UK when we sought out a local florist who were able to make a beautiful wreath with gorgeous flowers.

A little after 10.00am out popped Canon Robert Reiss from the Great West Door (the exit door for the paying public), and we went in where the tomb of the Unknown soldier lies (interred 1920) near the memorial telling the visitor "to never forget Winston Churchill". A familiar name was in front of the Unknown soldier's tomb - William Foxley Norris, the Dean of Westminster in the 1930s who Douglas Sladen was able to convince the idea of a bust for Gordon.

Poets' Corner is on the south side of the Abbey in a square area that abuts. The entire Abbey overflows with tombs and crypts, memorials, busts, plaques, on the walls, the floors, inside and out of the Abbey. Poets' Corner is no different. We should be proud

that Gordon has one of, if not, the best locations amongst his brother poets with few of the public passing through failing to notice the bust given its prominent location. The bust is about shoulder height on a marble ledge. The temporary tablet inscription that was placed in 1933 is no longer there. He is looking on his right side towards Tennyson. On his left is Campbell (who is near a bust memorial to Shakespeare). On the floor to Gordon's right is a group of about 20 poets including Browning and John Masefield who spoke at the 1934 annual pilgrimage held at Brighton General Cemetery.

Derek Wood QC OBE, our only UK member came along, and a representative from the Australian High Commission, Alan Giles and his daughter Caroline, as well as Canon Reiss, Vivienne and I. We stood around the bust for the service while the public walked and weaved around our little party.

Canon Reiss is one of nature's born gentlemen with a voice to rival James Bond and a personality that makes you feel welcome in a second after meeting him. We are very grateful to Canon Reiss for allowing us to film the ceremony and take a few

pictures.

The Chapter produced a professional service pamphlet which Canon Reiss read. We read our short five minute speech ending with Kendall's tribute;

"A shining soul with syllables of fire / Who sang the first great songs this land can claim / To be their own; the one who did not seem / To know what royal place awaited him / Within the Temple of the Beautiful".

Vivienne then laid the wreath and we "dedicated the memory of Adam Lindsay Gordon within the temple of the beautiful".



(above) Gordon's bust at Westminster Abbey

WESTMINSTER ABBEY

Read our speech of the Westminster Abbey service on-line by visiting the Members' Area of our website www.adamlindsaygordon.org

CHELTENHAM: THE EVER-FAITHFUL CITY

It is the resort town of Cheltenham where Gordon's ties are the strongest. Not only did he spend the majority of his childhood there, it is where his family are buried. These days, the nearby town of Prestbury is part of the wider Cheltenham area and it was at Prestbury the scene of *How We Beat the Favourite* was played out.

St. Mary's Parish Church—the oldest and only surviving medieval building in Cheltenham is the parish church. Were once it could be seen around the district, today it is hidden behind the main shopping street, much of the parish land having been developed in the 19th century. It was in Gordon's poem *Finis Exoptatus (Ye Wearie Wayfarer)* that he

wrote:
"Hark! the bells on distant cattle / Waft across the range, / Through the golden-tufted wattle, / Music low and strange; / Like the marriage peal of fairies / Comes the tinkling sound, / Or like chimes of sweet St. Mary's / On far English ground."

Cheltenham Cemetery—Sladen and Humphris' 1912 biography on Gordon features the grave of George Stevens as well as a photo (p238). The grave is on the main road near the chapel in the middle of the cemetery and is opposite the grave of the explorer Charles Sturt (1795-1869). Stevens was one of the many jockeys whom Gordon rode with and features in the classic *How We Beat the Favourite*:

" 'Aye, squire,' said Stevens, 'they back him at evens; / The race is all over, bar shouting, they say; / The Clown ought to beat her; Dick Neville is sweeter / Than ever—he swears he can win all the way' ".

Stevens and Gordon were 'Black' Tom Oliver's two famous pupils. Ironically, Stevens was killed in 1871 while riding on a cob named...*The Clown*.

25 Priory Street—the last home where Gordon lived before sailing to Australia, it still stands today none the worse for wear. The home of three stories would not be out of place amongst the grand terraces of East Melbourne. The tablet on the entrance that was unveiled by Douglas Sladen in 1933 is still affixed.



(above) St Mary's Church, Cheltenham



(above) George Stevens' monument at Cheltenham Cemetery

TRINITY CHURCH: FINDING THE GORDON FAMILY GRAVE



(above) At the Gordon family grave, Trinity Church, Cheltenham.

Of all the books that have been published on Poet Gordon, it is curious that a picture of the family grave at Trinity Church, Cheltenham has never been shown. Much effort and high hopes were placed on finding the grave. That we managed to locate it was fortunate having been provided with incorrect directions by the Trinity Church administration. The Church is located opposite a nondescript shopping car park and adjacent to a busy

thoroughfare. It is not your typical quaint English churchyard. Like St Mary's, development has reduced Trinity to a small parcel of land. All around the church building are large slate blocks, one for each grave. Where there is much foot traffic, the inscriptions are worn out and unreadable and many of the monuments have suffered this fate. The Gordon grave is near the side door entrance adjacent to Winchcombe Street and is quite worn but still readable to leave no doubt it is the

family grave. The inscription is badly worn down the right hand side. The three quotes from the bible in italics are unreadable as are most of the dates. Gordon wrote:

"I remember some words that my father said / When I was an urchin vain;— / God rest his soul, in his narrow bed / These ten long years he hath lain. / When I think one drop of the blood he bore / This faint hear surely must hold, / It may be my fancy and nothing more, / But this faint heart seemeth bold."

BROUGHTON HACKETT: TO THE MANOR BORN



(above) *The Manor*, Broughton Hackett



(above) Rear of *The Manor*. The former well in the foreground was once the pump that Gordon used to chase Sally Bridges around.

One of the highlights of our Gordon tour was a visit to *The Manor*, Broughton Hackett, which was once the home of the Bridges family. Gordon with one eye on Sally and the other on Jane—but his heart often wavering between both—was a frequent and welcome visitor at *The Manor* whilst staying with his uncle at Worcester. The hamlet of Broughton Hackett is a ‘blink-and-you’ll-miss-it’ dot on the map on the A422 a few miles from Worcester. If it wasn’t for the ‘witches hat’ placed on the roadside, we would have missed it even if we hadn’t blinked!

Alan Giles, the present owner of *The Manor* is a rare breed and a real character. Rarely will you find the owner of a home seek out its history over many years not because he wants to but because it’s

a privilege to do so. So it was while travelling overseas, The Adam Lindsay Gordon Commemorative Committee Inc. receives an email from none other than Alan Giles, Esquire and saying that “*by pure chance I stumbled upon your web site.*”

That unknown force of Fate was obviously telling us to go to Broughton Hackett. So a three-way scurry of emails between Paris, Broughton Hackett and Melbourne ensued and we jumped at the chance of visiting one of the most significant places in the story of Adam Lindsay Gordon. Readers need no reminding that it was at *The Manor* that Gordon experienced one of the many junctions that characterised his life. If only Jane Bridges had given Gordon some indication of her love, but alas! He played for his

stake—and lost it. So England lost a wayward son, but Australia gained the man who sang it’s voice.

One of Gordon’s poems, *To A Proud Beauty* was delivered to the Bridges sisters on 14 February 1853 after Gordon and Walker slept in the loft above the barn at *The Manor*.

“Though I have loved you well, I ween, / And you, too, fancied me, / Your heart hath too divided been / A constant heart to be. / And like the gay and youthful knight, / Who loved and rode away, / Your fleeting fancy takes a flight / With every fleeting day.”

Broughton Hackett today is still a gorgeous old place being restored by Alan whilst still retaining its rambling charm and warm ambience.

ST. KATHARINE DOCKS: GORDON’S LAST PORT OF CALL

Overshadowing two London landmarks—London Bridge and the London Tower—is St. Katharine Docks on the River Thames. It’s a quiet part of London largely ignored by tourists. The docks today is still in use where yachts and other vessels are moored. But in Gordon’s day it was a thriving port having been developed in 1825 by the renowned civil engineer Thomas Telford. It was still enjoying a thriving trade of

handling valuable and exotic goods from Europe and Africa until the 1930s. After the WWI, the ships were too large for the small docks and during WWII, it was used for war work and suffered much damage during the Blitz. Ivory House with its distinct clock tower (pictured) was built in 1852 just before Gordon sailed on 7 August 1853.

Many a Gordon biographer has written that the Poet departed on the bark *Julia*

from Gravesend, while others have indicated it was from St Katharine. One can imagine Gordon holding his father’s hand as he walked up the gangway of the ship:

“Oh, tell me, father mine, ere the good ship cross’d the brine, / On the gangway one mute hand-grip we exchanged, / Do you, past the grave, employ, for your stubborn reckless boy, / Those petitions that in life were ne’er estranged?”



(above) St. Katharine Docks, on the Thames River, London showing Ivory House (1852) in the background



(above) Australia House, London where there was once a replica of Gordon's statue by Paul Montford



(above) Wroughton Parish churchyard where 'Black' Tom Oliver is buried in an unadorned grave



(above) 14 Stroud Road, Gloucester where Charley Walker resided with Sally née Bridges in 1890s



(above) Greenhill London Road, Worcester where Gordon stayed with the family of his uncle R G Gordon



(above) Noverton Lane, Prestbury, scene of *How We Beat the Favourite*



(above) Worcester Grammar School, where Gordon was educated



(above) Trinity Church, Cheltenham where the Gordon family are buried



(above) 25 Priory Street, Cheltenham where the Gordon family lived



(above) Railway bridge over the Ythan river at Ellon

ESBLEMONT: SEARCHING FOR THE ELUSIVE MANSION

Whilst staying in beautiful Edinburgh, a trip was made to visit Esslemont, the Gordon ancestral home in north Scotland (Latitude 57° 21'52.03"N, Longitude 2° 6'50.24"W). The nearest town is Ellon, nearly 40 miles from Aberdeen on the A90. Ellon is a small town on the River Ythan for many years a traditional market centre for the surrounding area. It grew in the 1970s through development of the North Sea oil fields.

About two miles from Ellon is Esslemont at a junction on the A920. It is in name only for there is no township or even a sign indicating the 'town'. So it

was disappointing that we could not locate the mansion of Esslemont, much less photograph it though we did pass the ruins of the original Esslemont castle (pictured below) that still stands on the corner of an intersection west of the junction towards Ellon. The Gordon family crest is still on the wall of the crumbling building. About 0.2 miles from the junction was the site of the Esslemont railway station which formed part of the Esslemont estate. There are no longer any remains of the station nor the railway line, however the railway bridge over the Ythan is still standing near where the station of Ellon is.



(above) The ruins of Esslemont Castle near Ellon (Google Maps)

THE ADAM LINDSAY GORDON GRAVE RESTORATION APPEAL

We have now raised just under \$7,900 for The Adam Lindsay Gordon Grave Restoration Appeal.

Thank you to everyone who donated to the Appeal especially the following:

Stephen Beaumont, Glen Clifford, Patricia McLay, Carol Walters (\$50), Essendon Historical Society Inc., Kate Zouev (\$40), Martyn Smith (\$35).

