

William Adams of 'Sorrento'

William Adams was best known in the Moseley district as a philanthropist of considerable wealth. The family came from Sheffield, where his father had been a coal miner, and later was a founder-member of the Refuge Assurance Company. William, who was born in 1857, was Midland Manager and later a Director of the Refuge, and he moved to Birmingham in the eighties. He looked for a suitable residence and was attracted to Packwood House, but his wife did not like the yew trees. He ended up building a large house in Wake Green Road, Moseley, calling it 'Sorrento', where he and his wife had spent their honeymoon. He had four daughters and eleven grandchildren who all grew up in or around Moseley. He adopted the crest and motto of the Refuge - "Nil absque labore" (Nothing without labour) - and this was on the gates of Sorrento; appropriate in view of the later history of the house.

William stood for West Staffordshire as a Liberal parliamentary candidate, but was unsuccessful. He was a Primitive Methodist and endowed a number of chapels, including that at Sparkhill, where he also presented the organ. He was also responsible for building the Primitive Methodist Chapel at Tyseley and the Institute there. He had some association with Joseph Arch, the founder of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union, and helped him financially.

William was a keen sportsman and he played cricket for Sparkhill. He was a leading member of the Warwickshire County Cricket Club and of the Birmingham Football Club. He was President of the Kings Heath Cricket Club. He presented the Adams Shield for international athletics, and he is said to have employed cricketers in his garden so as to secure them for the team.

William Adams died suddenly in 1911 at the early age of 54. His obituary refers to him as a man of blunt geniality and private benevolence. Mrs. Adams and the family moved, a year later, to Abingdon Lodge, 62 Wake Green Road, now a nursing home. She died in 1930.

Sorrento was used as a military convalescent hospital during and after the 1914-1918 war, but in 1929 it opened as a Maternity Hospital with twenty-one beds.

Fred Price (from Some Moseley Personalities Volume II 1994)

Sources:

- Obituary in Birmingham Post, March, 1911
- Moseley Presbyterian Church - A Candid History, (Moseley Local History Society, 1991)