

The Reverend John Robert Davison M.A., first vicar of St Mary's Church and his children, Robert John William Davison, School Master/Headmaster and Nora Davison, watercolourist and illustrator.

John Robert Davison was born in 1822, the son of John Davison, Rector of Washington, Durham, and his wife Mary (née Thorp).ⁱ He was the eldest of four sons and six daughters. In 1826 John senior was given a preferment at Upton-Upon-Severn, Worcestershire where he remained until his death on 6TH May 1834. It was said of him that:

The superiority of his mental powers renders his death as a real loss to the church, and the amiable qualities of his heart will cause him to be long and justly lamented by his widow and numerous family.ⁱⁱ

On Tuesday last died, at Cheltenham, the Rev. John Davison, B.D. late Fellow of Oriel College, a Prebendary of the Cathedrals of St. Paul's and Worcester; Vicar of Old Sodbury, Gloucestershire, with Chipping Sodbury Curacy, (patrons, the Dean and Chapter of Worcester); and Rector of Upton-upon-Severn, Worcestershire, (patron, the Bishop of Worcester).—M.A. July 9, 1801; B.D. Oct. 22, 1818.

Notice of Death for Rev. John Davison, B.D. in the *Oxford University and City Herald* on 10th May 1834

In the 1841 census, aged 18, John Robert Davison, John senior's eldest son, was a scholar at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he matriculated with a B.A. in May 1845. On 20th December 1846, John Robert Davison B.A., Deacon at Corpus Christi, Oxford was ordained into Holy Orders at Worcester Cathedral by Henry Pepys D.D., the Bishop of Worcester. Subsequently, the Rev John R. Davison, M.A. was ordained a priest the following December and became the Assistant Curate at Bromsgrove and also the Chaplain of the Union Workhouse.ⁱⁱⁱ



Rev John Robert Davison

The Rev John R. Davison became the Perpetual Curate of Moseley Chapel, dedicated to St Mary on 21st April 1852.^{iv} The title Perpetual Curate was applied to those ministers who were assigned to churches that had received a grant from Queen Anne's Bounty. St Mary's Chapel had three such grants, the first in 1755. The patron of St Mary's was the Vicar of Bromsgrove in the diocese of Worcester until the

creation of the diocese of Birmingham in 1905 when there was a swap of advowsons and the new Bishop of Birmingham became the patron. In exchange, the Vicar of Bromsgrove received the patronage of the Parish of Blockley, now in Gloucestershire but then an exclave of Worcestershire. Its church and vicarage are used in the Father Brown TV series.^v

On 10th August 1852, the Rev John R. Davison married Elizabeth Jane Villiers, the only daughter of the Vicar of Bromsgrove.

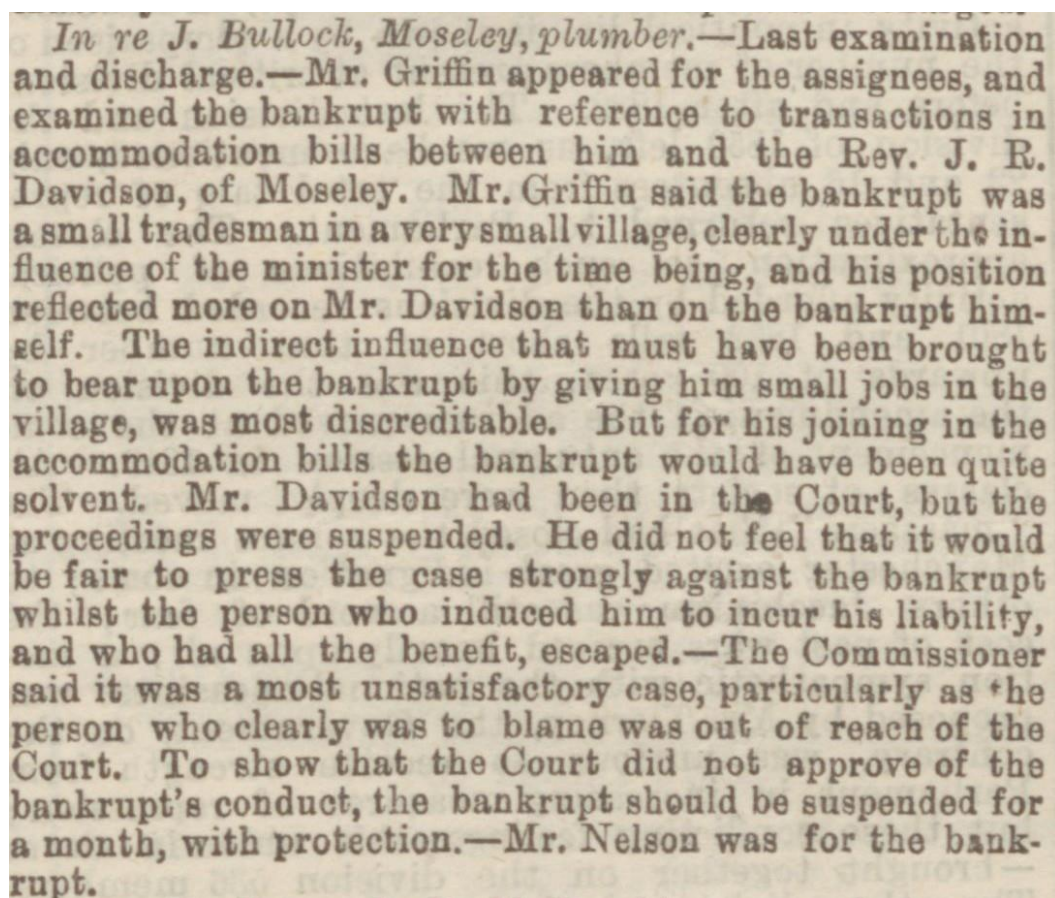
CLERGYMEN MARRIED.
August 10, at Bromsgrove, the Rev. John Robert Davison, eldest son of the late Rev. John Davison, Rector of Upton-upon-Severn, and Prebendary of Worcester Cathedral, to Elizabeth Jane, only daughter of the Rev. W. Villiers, Vicar of Bromsgrove.

Oxford Journal, 28th August 1852

A year later, in 1853, Moseley Chapel was granted a fully defined boundary and became a District Chapelry. This meant that the Rev Davison was able to celebrate Holy Matrimony and receive the statutory fees.

The Reverend Davison and his wife had two children, a son, Robert John William Davison born on 20th August 1853 and a daughter, Emily Susannah Eleanor Davison, known as Nora, on 4th May 1855.

clear, Mr Bullock did not keep or hand on the invoices from these tradesmen and, as a result, he was made liable for these debts. At court, when questioned on the matter Mr Bullock responded that he was 'not the church warden and only a member of the choir'. The Commissioner overseeing this case decided it would not be fair to press the case against Mr Bullock, who would have otherwise been solvent, but made it clear 'he did not approve of his conduct'. As a result, Rev Davison became responsible for the debt and consequently declared bankrupt on 30th April.



In re J. Bullock, Moseley, plumber.—Last examination and discharge.—Mr. Griffin appeared for the assignees, and examined the bankrupt with reference to transactions in accommodation bills between him and the Rev. J. R. Davidson, of Moseley. Mr. Griffin said the bankrupt was a small tradesman in a very small village, clearly under the influence of the minister for the time being, and his position reflected more on Mr. Davidson than on the bankrupt himself. The indirect influence that must have been brought to bear upon the bankrupt by giving him small jobs in the village, was most discreditable. But for his joining in the accommodation bills the bankrupt would have been quite solvent. Mr. Davidson had been in the Court, but the proceedings were suspended. He did not feel that it would be fair to press the case strongly against the bankrupt whilst the person who induced him to incur his liability, and who had all the benefit, escaped.—The Commissioner said it was a most unsatisfactory case, particularly as the person who clearly was to blame was out of reach of the Court. To show that the Court did not approve of the bankrupt's conduct, the bankrupt should be suspended for a month, with protection.—Mr. Nelson was for the bankrupt.

The bankruptcy case against Mr J. Bullock, *Birmingham Journal*, 5th May 1866.^{vii}

The matter was settled on 12th May and an order of discharge was made by Commissioner Sanders.^{viii} In the same year, 1866, the District Chapelry was transformed into an Ecclesiastical Parish and

for the first time the Incumbent, the Rev John Robert Davison, could be called Vicar.

The Parish quickly grew. To accommodate the increasing population Oxford Road was cut in 1870 as far as School Road in order to build more housing. It was extended subsequently in two or three parts to follow its present course. The final part to reach St Agnes church, was constructed in the 1880s.^{ix}

Tragedy struck the family in 1876, when the Rev Davison died on Sunday 10th September 1876, aged 53, after being struck by lightning a few days before. He was buried at St Mary's four days later. The organist Frederick H. Bell wrote of him:^x

The Rev J. R. Davison died, regretted most by those who knew him best and, honourable tribute, greatly lamented by the poor of the Parish

A CLERGYMAN KILLED BY LIGHTNING.—The Rev. J. R. Davison, M.A., Vicar of Moseley, near Birmingham, died under painful circumstances at the Vicarage on Sunday week. A short time ago Mr. Davison was struck by lightning, and rendered temporarily insensible. With the aid of restoratives he apparently recovered, but shortly after had a relapse, and has been gradually sinking ever since. The deceased was appointed to the Incumbency in 1852.

Notice of death of Rev J. R. Davison, Oxford Gazette, 16th September 1876

However, on 28th September 1876, a request was made to state that his death was caused by an 'insidious complaint of long standing'.^{xi}

The death of the late Rev. J. R. Davison, of Moseley, attributed on the 12th inst. to a stroke of lightning, was really caused, we are requested to state, by an insidious complaint of long standing.

As a result of her husband's death, his widow and daughter Nora moved out of the Vicarage in School Road to 16 Margaret Street, Marylebone, London. Nora's brother, Robert, at the time was a Master at Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire from 1875 before enrolling as an undergraduate at Downing College, Cambridge from Michaelmas 1880. He graduated with a B.A on 14th October 1884.

After graduation Robert became a Master at Macclesfield Grammar School from 1884 and eventually the Head Master of Ilminster Grammar School from 1891. He died on February 10th 1913, aged 59, at Cross House, Ilminster. Robert had been the first non-clergyman of the school. On his appointment it was said that:

The Governors were not happy about the Boy's School at the time of his appointment, but things seem to have improved very quickly.

Nora, attended the Birmingham School of Art and in 1872 was awarded 'excellent' for her model drawing.^{xii}

After her father's death and the move to London, Nora continued her studies under the supervision of Mr A Ludovici, junior, in his atelier at 105 Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square with Miss Elise Paget, niece of Sir James Paget, and three other women artists.^{xiii}

Many of Nora's earliest submissions to exhibitions were seascapes including two seaside studies at the Bristol Fine Arts Academy Exhibition in April 1882 and 'Waiting for the Tide' and 'Trawlers in a Calm' at the Society of British Artists in December 1883. At the Society of Lady Artists, Marlborough Street, London in March 1884, Nora's 'Brixham Harbour' was described as 'vigorously painted and a luminous study'.

Over time, Nora exhibited twenty works at the Society of British Artists, two at the New Water Colour Society, five at the Grosvenor

Gallery, and ten at the New Gallery. In 1892, she became a newly elected member of the Dudley Gallery Art Society, in Park Lane, London. It was founded in 1861 by the Earl of Dudley to house his valuable art collection and used for that society's exhibitions. Nora exhibited several pictures there, one of which, 'A Farewell Visit' was much acclaimed. She was also an illustrator for magazines, including the ladies' weekly journal *Hearth and Home*. Paintings by Nora were admired and purchased by the Royal Family - an article in *Art Notes*, published on 31 October, 1894, commented.^{xiv}

'There is, at all events, one artist in the country who has faith in the much-talked-of Royal taste for painting. Miss Nora Davison, the daughter of a Birmingham clergyman, exhibited at the recent Art Exhibition at Ryde, a picture which attracted the attention of Princess Henry of Battenberg. The Princess purchased it, and was so pleased with the quality of Miss Davison's work, that she requested her to send her portfolio to Osborne for inspection. The Queen herself looked over it, and has since purchased three of Miss Davison's works.'

Nora's mother, Elizabeth, died on the 14th May 1899 at No 1 Carlisle Place, London. Nora continued to live there after her mother's death until at least 1901 before moving in with her brother at Cross House, Ilminster.

After his death in 1913, Nora moved to 126, High Street, Eton, Buckinghamshire. It was here that her best known watercolours were painted, many of Eton College which now holds a collection of forty-four of them. An exhibition of watercolours by Nora depicting Eton houses was held at Spottiswoode's Library in Eton in December 1915. She is said to have been referred to as 'our sitting member' in the *Eton College Chronicle*.^{xv}

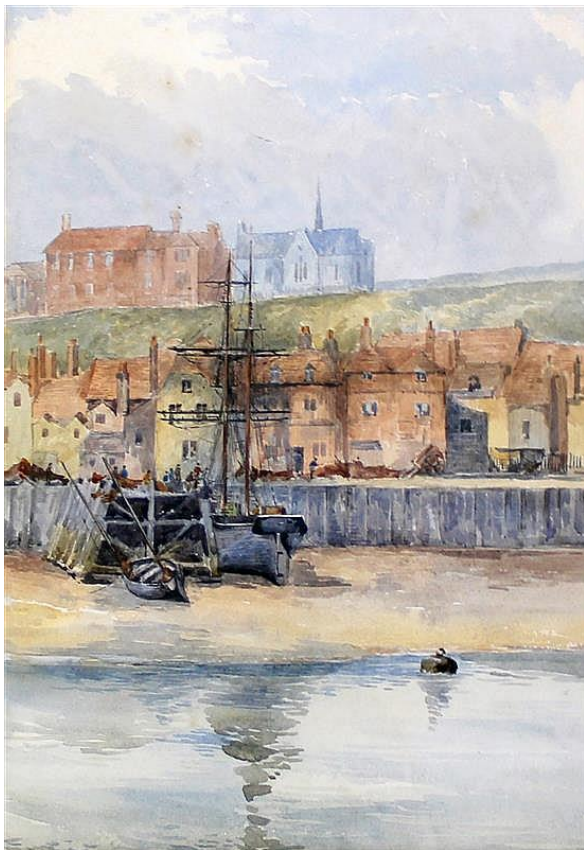


Some of Nora's paintings of Eton College

Eton High Street is only a short walk to Windsor, where this painting of the Grenadier Guards at Castle Hill was executed.



Reporting on Nora's move from the area to Worcester on 16 January, 1935, the *Daily Mirror* wrote that Nora 'has painted Eton College and Windsor Castle from every angle'.



Other seascape paintings by Nora

(Top left) At Whitstable

(Top right) Sail makers at Bristol Docks

(Left) Whitby Harbour

(Above) Yachts at Cowes

Nora died at 1, Commandery Drive, Worcester on 28th October 1950, aged 95. The picture on the right of Edgar Tower, Worcester was painted during her time there.



**Written and researched by Edwina Rees, Moseley Society History
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Endnotes

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- i John Robert Davison was baptised on 27th October 1822
 - ii *Gloucester Chronicle*, 10th May 1834
 - iii *Morning Herald London* 21st December 1846
 Gloucester Chronicle 25th December 1847
 - iv *St Mary's, Moseley: At the heart of Moseley for over 600 years,
 A Guidebook and history*, p22
 - v Reference Rob Brown, St Mary's Church, Moseley
 - vi See v
 - vii The newspaper report of the court proceedings erroneously spelled
 Davison as 'Davidson'.
 - viii *Birmingham Daily Post*, 17th March 1866
 Birmingham Journal, 5th May 1866
 Birmingham Journal, 12th May 1866

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- ix See v
- x *See iv*
- xi In the *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette*, 28th September 1876. the date of death is stated as 12th September, although all other sources state the 10th September.
- xii *Birmingham Daily Post*, 4th July 1972
- xiii *Lady's Pictorial*, 26th October 1889
- xiv Roundtree Tryon Gallery website
- xv See xiii