

## DAVID COX

GREAT MEN OF HARBORNE: DAVID COX 1783 - 1859

by Mrs Jill Hickman

This article was published in Harborne Parish Magazine in 1983 to mark the bi-centenary of his birth.

David Cox was born in 1783 in Deritend, the son of a smith. He was very frail, so he was apprenticed to a miniature painter, and then later he painted theatrical scenery.

At the age of 21 he set out for London, became a friend of Samuel Prout, and made small drawings, charging low fees for them. He had a few lessons from John Varley, but was mostly self-taught. In 1808, he married his landlady's daughter, then lived several years at Dulwich, drawing and teaching. Towards the end of 1814, he was finding it difficult to care for his family, so he took a post as a drawing master at a young ladies' seminary at Hereford, which brought him closer to his beloved North Wales.

He published a 'Treatise on Landscape Painting and Effect in Watercolours', which gives expression to the rules and principles to which he adhered. Cox loved thatched cottages, stooping willows, and so on, and was genuine in his simplicity. He preferred England to going abroad, but he visited Belgium and Holland in 1826, and he went to Paris in 1829, where he did some very fine drawings; the Church of St Eustache is very beautiful with a touch of severity in it. He appreciated architecture in other forms than the ready made picturesque.

In 1830, he became a member of the Society of Painters in Water-Colour, where he exhibited regularly throughout his life. He now moved to London and his middle period drawings of numberless hay-fields, castles, and so on, reflect his love of breeze and sunshine. Crossing the Sands and Sun, Wind and Rain are fine examples:



Crossing the Sands



Sun, Wind and Rain

Cox took to oil painting comparatively late, taking lessons from W. J. Müller in 1839. Among his most famous oil paintings are The Welsh Funeral and Rhyl Sands.



The Welsh Funeral



Rhyl Sands

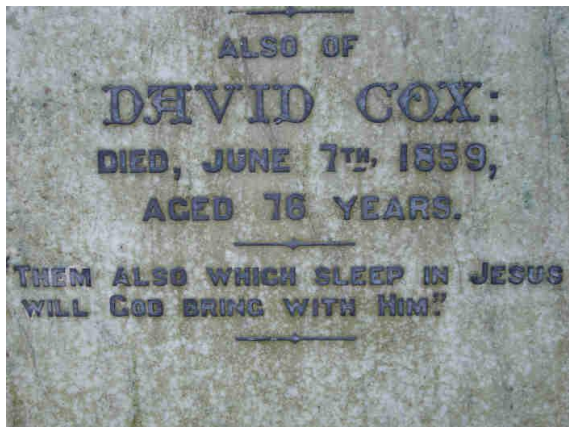
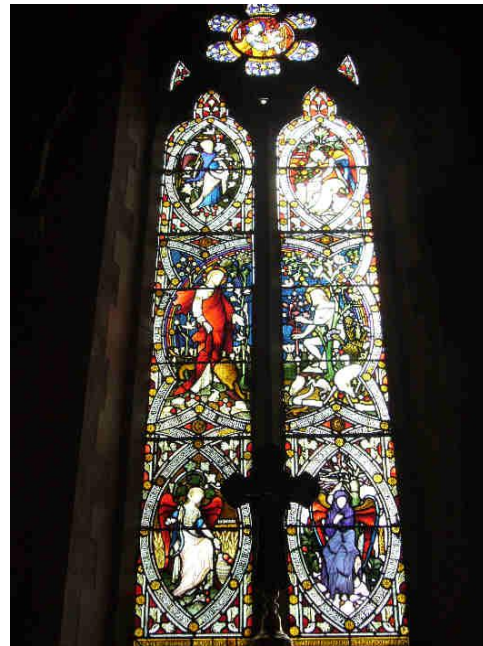
In 1841, he gave up teaching and moved to a house in Greenfield Road, Harborne, two miles from Birmingham; though much altered this house still stands and bears a plaque to his memory. He loved its quiet situation; it lay in a lane leading to Harborne Church beyond which was open country. He liked being secluded, so he kept the front door always fastened and all visitors were received at

the garden door at the back. Cox had a studio at the house. He used to go to St Peter's Church, where his white head was a familiar sight above the tall box pews.

Towards the end of his life a group of friends who much loved and admired him, presented him with a portrait of himself. They commissioned John Watson Gordon to paint it and he agreed provided David Cox would travel to Edinburgh to sit, which he managed to do. The presentation took place at the home of Charles Birch; it was all nearly too much for him, as he was quite an old man by then.

He died in 1859, mourned by many, and he is buried in St Peter's Churchyard. Inside the church, the three windows at the east end were placed there in 1874, the centre one in memory of David Cox. It shows Adam with Christ the Second Adam, in the Garden of Eden.

David Cox's Grave and the window in his memory



Oil paintings by Cox are on display in the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery. The extensive collection of his watercolours is available to view by appointment with the Prints and Drawings Department at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery.