

Visits to the Red Church – Notes for Guides

This gives a brief introduction to the history of the Red Church and is intended as a help to any guides with visiting groups.

QR codes on the site give additional information and pictures.

*Group Leaders should make all visitors aware of the
Safety Notice at the end of this summary.*

Starting at the eastern entrance - off the footpath between Broseley and Jackfield.

Looking over the churchyard some 250 years ago, you'd have seen something like this painting, made by Edward Oakes Ball. This magnificent church, red from the colour of its bricks, was built on a high point of the land known as the Rock. It overlooked the surrounding area and – difficult to appreciate today with all the trees – it could be seen from the Ironbridge Gorge and surrounding countryside.



It was needed because the existing St Leonard's Church in Broseley held only 108 persons and was inadequate for the rapidly growing community in the early days of the Industrial Revolution. The new church held 260 persons.

Officially known as the Chapel of St Mary's, it was built closer to Jackfield to provide easier access for people from that community. A bequest made in about 1759 by Mary Brown of the Benthall Hall family funded the building. Unfortunately, she didn't see the results of her gift as she died in 1761. The church was completed by Francis Turner Blithe in 1767.

The church was 30 yds long and 10 yds wide with a tower some 75ft high. The surrounding churchyard was 50 yds long and 25 yds wide.

Q - How many persons do you think were buried in the churchyard?

A - Parish records show that it was about 1200.

The first burial was that of Francis Oaks in April 1770. The church also held some 600 baptisms in its lifetime, the first being Susannah Bradley in 1767.

The church suffered from maintenance problems early in its existence believed to be a result of the land being unstable from previous mining. In 1845, the old St Leonards' Church in Broseley was demolished and replaced by the new All Saints' Church, which held over 600 worshippers. Clearly the need for the old Red Church declined and understandably it was given less care and attention.

Demolition of the decaying Red Church was considered in 1863 encouraged by local mining companies, but the local population objected that this would disturb the burials of their ancestors.

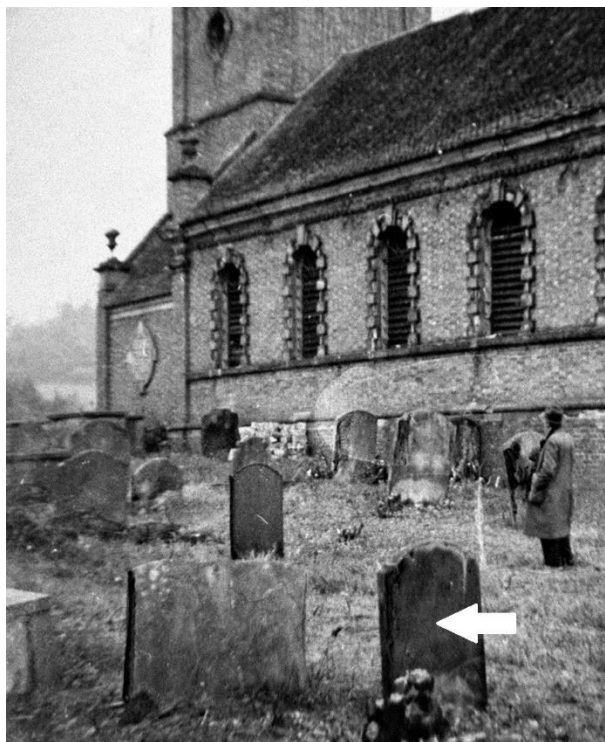
In 1861, Jackfield was declared a separate Parish from Broseley and in view of the condition of the Red Church, a replacement Parish Church was required - the beautiful new St Mary's Church by the river. The new church had no churchyard, so the old church was included in the new Parish. However, by 1885, that was full and officially "Closed" so most burials continued in the new Broseley cemetery. In exceptional circumstances burials at the old churchyard were still allowed e.g. for relatives of those in previously existing family vaults. Some 20-30 persons were buried there under those conditions, the last known being as recently as 1951.

Services at the old chapel became less frequent but it was still used for Sunday School and some other services until the 1930s. With disuse and without maintenance, its condition decayed. The site became a vandalised playground. It was declared dangerous and crudely demolished in 1961 with little attention paid to conditions stipulating that all memorials should be preserved. The result is what you see today, with a few remaining memorials at the southern and eastern edge of the site. Much of the site remains covered with demolition debris.

One photograph from 1939 gives a remarkable impression of the churchyard, crowded and in a respectable condition, with well over 100 memorials, some of which were spectacular vaults. The memorial stone (arrowed) in the foreground of the black-and-white photograph is the same stone we can see nearest the entrance today, which is to Mary Everall.

It is strange that the churchyard remains consecrated. It is owned by the Diocese of Hereford, who have ceded maintenance to Shropshire Council as is allowed by Act of Parliament.

There are no standards set for that maintenance and the site has been largely ignored.



Friends of the Red Church was formed in 2020 to restore the churchyard to a more respectful and respectable condition and to establish its significant contribution to the heritage of the district through the lives and activities of those baptised or buried there.

In moving round the site, clockwise, see the QR code links which illustrate various view of the church in a dilapidated condition before its demolition.
Watch out also for some of the 'jigsaws' in progress to restore fragmented memorials.

At the time of writing, this site has some 27 remaining memorials in variable conditions and here is a summary of some of them.

The first memorial to Mary Everall has already been mentioned. We haven't yet found out much about her or her relatives, other than she was a baker.

Select from the following, moving down the path:

- On the left - two cast iron memorials are to the brothers John and George Hinsley, who were both blacksmiths. Some later generations of the family are buried in Madeley.
- The next on the right - in memory of Jane and Thomas Amphlett. Thomas was a bargeman and his descendants reflect the changes in local work with time. His son, also Thomas (b 1797) started working on the river but with the decline of mining and goods to transport, his was one of several families that started a brickworks using the readily available local clay. His business operated until the arrival of the Great Western Railway in 1862 the route of which went straight through his works.
- Just before that is a small memorial inscribed "J.A. 1846." Parish records tell us that this is for John Ashwood, aged 6 weeks, the son of the local postmaster. This reflects the reality of early deaths in those time, with some 20-25% of children not surviving beyond 5 years.
- Moving on, we come to heavily damaged vaults without any surviving memorials. We believe that these vaults are the remains of graves to four persons including Alexander Brodie and Thomas Cochrane. Both these were important figures in local history. Brodie was an ironmaster at the Calcutts ironworks which was developed to be significant by his uncle of the same name. Two cannon from this factory, supplied to HMS Victory, are on display at Portsmouth. An adjacent ruined grave was to his Works Manager, Thomas Cochrane. Two generations later, Cochrane's grandson Alexander became nationally important, involved in building the Clifton Suspension Bridge, Westminster Bridge and the Crystal Palace.
- Close by these vaults is a separate grave to an Elizabeth Merric.
- On the right, we come to a hipped rectangular stone cover of a family vault bearing inscriptions on all four angled faces. These are to members of the Beard and Lloyd families. These families include two victims of the Coalport Ferry Disaster of 1799, William Beard aged 16 and his sister Elizabeth aged 14. It also includes the last known barge builder on the river, William Beard who died in 1904.
- Beyond this on the right, there is another destroyed vault and we just have a few pieces of the memorial which tells us that it is the vault of a Samel Roden, who was associated with famous Broseley Clay-pipe making.

- Behind that we see a beautifully preserved cast iron vault cover to Elizabeth Lloyd, the wife of another barge owner George Lloyd. It's strange that Elizabeth is the only person listed on the memorial.
- Further on at the left, we come to the best-preserved memorial in the churchyard with a particularly clear inscription to Charles Davies, who was a maltster. It is somewhat ironic that we know that he died "in the parlour of the Fox Inn" in 1829.
- Behind this is the memorial to the bargeman Adam Yates and his wife Lydia. The story of this family gives one insight into the nature of Jackfield as an inland port - it was lawless, bawdy and violent and probably one of the most unpleasant places to live with all the fumes, noise, contamination and unpleasantness of local industries. There is a record that Adam horsewhipped Lydia for being drunk.
- Moving around the path, we come to the western entrance to the churchyard. Originally this was the main entrance to the site with the church door and tower opposite it.
- Work is in progress to outline the foundations of the old church, They will be covered with slabs to make the position of the church more obvious in the site.
- Before the path turns along the eastern boundary of the site, two graves which survived the demolition can be seen in the north-east corner.
- Back towards the main entrance, there is one large flat and beautifully engraved memorial to members of the Booth family, a mother and two daughters. Judging by the dates in 1797, the mother and a daughter died soon after childbirth, representing the difficulties for families in those times. The inscription is difficult to read, but the beautiful first few lines are: "If e'er perfection was in woman found / in her who sleeps beneath, it did abound / In every duty strict she passed through life / A friend, acquaintance and beloved wife."

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Other memorials

The new St Mary's Church in Jackfield contains two memorials which were transferred from the Red Church before demolition. These are:

- A very weatherbeaten memorial to the ironmaster Alexander Brodie, discussed above. It is placed behind the organ
- A magnificent memorial to Thomas and Margaret Phillips, both buried in the churchyard in 1783. Thomas was effectively "Lord of the Manor" who inherited substantial parts of Dawley, Madeley and Stirchley at the age of 12 in 1765. It is located in the vestry which is not always open.

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Other burials - from Parish Records

With some 1200 burials, these 20 or so memorials only give a brief impression of the importance of this churchyard in local history. Stories from other persons known from Parish Records to be buried there include:

- Members of the Stephan family, including Pierre (1745-1821). Originally emigrants from the continent, he and his son Peter (1796-1877) were two of the most accomplished artist-modellers at Coalport China factory. Their works are exhibited around the World.
- Members of the Ball family whose descendants became some of the most significant painters of products from Craven Dunnill tile company and Coalport China. A member of this family, Marcus, employed initially as a labourer in a brickworks, emigrated to the USA in 1881 and rather surprisingly became a wealthy businessman in Manhattan.
- Members of the Love family including Sarah Love born in the Broseley Jitties. Her son John William Binks became captain of the RMS Olympic, sister ship to the Titanic. This ship was involved in a collision with a lightship when approaching New York, an accident in which 11 persons were killed.

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Cholera

In 1832 and 1834, Broseley was one of many parts of the country which suffered from the cholera epidemics that had originated in Afghanistan. Locally more than 42 persons lost their lives. It was “not considered appropriate” that the victims were buried in the churchyard. A separate mass grave was dug some 100 yds to the west of the churchyard. A solitary memorial stone to one of the victims, Thomas Crump, marks the site which is now on private land. This can be viewed through the substantial steel fence. The site is not accessible.

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More detailed information can be found on the following:

The website www.broseley.org.uk/redchurch includes a more detailed history of the church and summary of baptisms and burials at the site.

Friends’ publications of stories from the site - Tales from the Red Church 1 and 2.

Facebook - Friends of the Red Church. Instagram – friendsoftheredchurch_broseley

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Frequent questions

Q – You haven’t said how many marriages were carried out at the church?

A – No, this is not a mistake. The Hardwick Marriage Act of 1753 tightened up regulations regarding marriages and this included that marriages were only allowed in the main Parish Church. Having been built to cater for overflow from the old St Leonard’s Church in Broseley, the Red Church was considered a subsidiary to that church, also referred to as a “Chapel-of-Ease.” Conditions for worshippers there also included that all should attend a service at the mother church at Easter or Pentecost and that all fees, duties etc. should be paid without deduction to the rector of Broseley.”

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Q - How is it possible that maintenance can be ceded to a local authority?

A - When a churchyard is full and closed, the Diocese can transfer responsibility for that churchyard to the Local Authority. This arises from the fact that churchyards were originally the only burial places available for any denomination or indeed, none at all. As the churchyard was available for the whole community, it was considered reasonable that when it was closed, the expense of keeping it in decent order should revert to the community. This is adopted in the Local Government Act of 1972 and responsibility now lies with Shropshire Council. The only guide to the standard of maintenance is the words in a guide for churchwardens that “the churchyard should be kept in a decent and fitting manner and that it be cleared of all rubbish, muck, thorns briers, shrubs and anything else that may annoy parishioners.” This has largely been ignored by both the Diocese of Hereford and Shropshire Council.

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Q - Normally burials are aligned east-west yet some appear differently.

A – We are not sure that the vault covers are in the correct places and their present position is likely a result of vandalism. We are not allowed to move them.

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Safety Notice

Keep to the marked path and tread carefully, particularly on wet, slippery stone.

The ground is very uneven, with hidden voids.

Children should be supervised at all times.

Avoid touching plants.

Do not attempt to clean the memorials.

In any emergency, contact 999 or 101.

The nearest road access is Red Church Close, TF12 5FZ.

(What three words location is lingering.saying.frown)

The nearest hospital is Princess Royal Hospital, Telford TF1 6TF.

The nearest minor Injuries clinic is at Bridgnorth Hospital, WV16 5JA.