

Wood View – A Terrace Through Time



Wood View in 1938

Wood View in Shincliffe village was built towards the end of the nineteenth century and probably started in 1893 before being completed in 1895. The terrace is still a prominent feature of the village and is situated above the Poplar Tree Garden Centre.

The driving force for the building of the houses was Charlton Robson, a local brick manufacturer who ran the Shincliffe Brick and Tile Works which was situated along what is now the Peterlee Road. It was located near to the present site of the Shincliffe Mill Nursery. Robson, an entrepreneur with ties to a building works near Bishop Auckland, was quick to spot the potential of developing houses in the village and he did so for precisely the same reasons that exist in our own day.

Shincliffe was and is just a short distance from Durham. It would have been easily accessible on foot; horse-drawn carriages would have made their way along the Stockton Road; people looking for accommodation would have seen an opportunity to provide a more amenable standard of living for themselves and their families. Durham, while still an attractive proposition for the growing middle-classes, is a relatively small city and lots of housing development had already taken place. The north-east economy was booming. While Durham City did not see the huge industrial expansion of some of its neighbours, it still had its fair share of factories and outlets.

Crucially, and perhaps the biggest factor in Robson buying the land, was that the site of Wood View and what would become the eponymous Robson’s buildings were remnants of industrial land or, rather, previous housing. (See Appendix 1.) Miners’ housing had occupied the site. The workers would have made their way to the Old Durham mine just along the river or over the railway bridge to Houghall colliery. We believe that the land was perhaps in the hands of the Joseph Love estate. He was a notorious mine owner (as well as brick manufacturer), and it is quite possible that Robson had purchased the brickworks from him.

Robson built five houses initially with the other two being added at a later period but before the 1901 census. It should also be noted that the current houses are numbered 1-7 from the roadside along to the end. The numbers were switched around on 17th June 1932 by Durham Rural District Council so that Charlton Robson’s house, initially Number 1 and adjacent to the fields leading to Shincliffe Hall, became Number 7. For the purposes of this article, we will retain the current numbering when referring to the residents and the houses in which they lived.

If Robson intended to attract a “better class of person” to his development, then the 1901 census would appear to have borne this out. We have included the heads of the household here only rather than the wives, children, and servants.

Number 1	Number 2	Number 3	Number 4	Number 5	Number 6	Number 7
Solicitor	Inspector of “nuisances”	Artist	Bank Inspector	Hosier Self-employed business	Chief Clerk Probate Office	Traveller for brick company
James Lodge	James Menzies	Joseph Snowball	William Walton	Samuel Fenny	Alfred E Davies	Charlton Robson

Fig. 1: the professions of the people occupying Wood View in 1901

In contrast, we can see the type of workers who occupied Robson’s Buildings, as the terrace was known, at the same time.

1	2	3	4	5
Draper’s Assistant		House painter	Boiler inspector	Colliery clerk

Fig 2: the professions of the occupants of Robson’s Buildings in 1901

Robson's story was one of a working-class boy made good. He was originally from Penshaw, or "Pensher" as it was pronounced and written in the nineteenth century. His father worked in a brickworks and he joined the business, acquiring enough knowledge and expertise to be able to acquire his own outfit eventually. He married twice, his first wife having predeceased him, and he was to suffer further personal tragedy when his son and daughter died at a very young age. He lived in Orange Tree House, appears to have been active in the Methodist Church and would have been regarded as a prominent figure in the village.

We are grateful to Amanda Stobbs whose family lived in Number 7 for about one hundred years. Thanks to the treasure trove of information acquired by her grandfather, Joseph Landt Mawson, over the years, we are able to know a bit more about Robson and his development of the site.

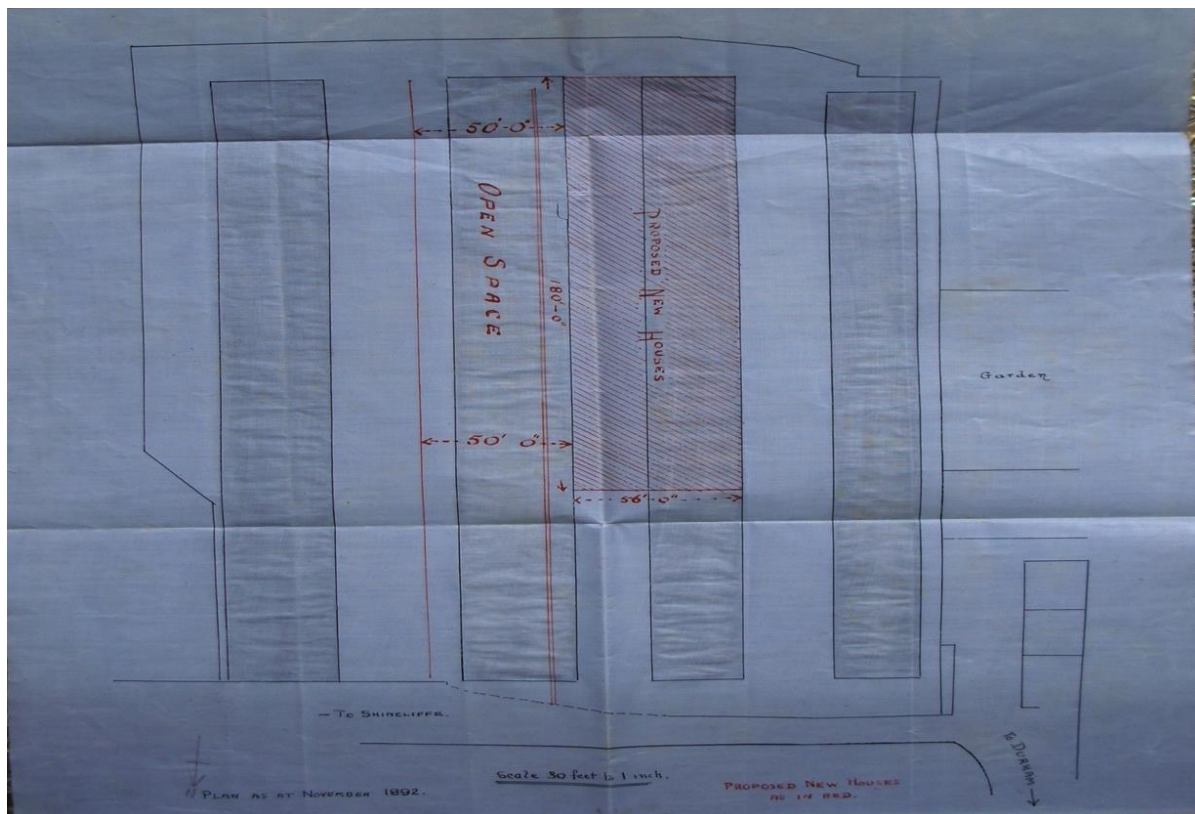


Fig 3: The original plans for Wood View

The writing at the bottom of the document shows that the plans were in place in November 1892, just over one hundred and thirty years ago. The shaded red column seems to indicate that there would be five houses (the current Number 7 to 3). Building would have started with Charlton Robson's house (the current Number 7), and it was usual for the builder to reserve the end, and therefore largest house, for himself. There are many examples of this in London and some of the prize developments in the north-east. The suburb of Ashbrooke in Sunderland is one such example. The picture below highlights the space and room that would have been available to the residents. This land, set in what would still have been seen as a rural village, must have been a huge attraction to people wanting to live there.



Fig 4: The current Number 7 – Charlton Robson's original home.

Robson, as befits most successful businessmen then and now, was keen to display his wealth and social status. One aspect of this would have been to keep his own ponies and trap. Before the advent of cars, they were a signifier of wealth since owning them would have involved a cost in terms of food, cleaning, and upkeep re: farriers and maintenance of the trap. Robson was clever enough to retain some of the miners' cottages to house his ponies and trap, a construction that has been retained at the time of writing (November 2023).



Fig 5: the stables that housed Charlton Robson's ponies.



Fig 6: The outbuildings at 7 Wood View.

The picture above shows the extent of the ways in which Robson utilised the old miners' cottages for his own ends. The garage to the right was an addition built by Mr Mawson. Other houses in the terrace now have garages at the rear of the houses and would have been a response to the growth of the car industry in the twentieth century.

A key feature of Robson's earlier houses was how much he used the existing stonework from the miners' cottages to augment the houses in Wood View (see below).



Fig 7: the stonework from the miners' cottages used in the construction of Wood View.

Precisely when Robson completed the last two houses in the terrace i.e. current numbers two and one, is not clear. If you take a close look, the brick work is different and there are no signs of the old miners' houses being reconstituted. Did Robson employ a different builder? How quickly were they constructed? The same design has clearly been used as they are in keeping with the rest of the terrace.



Fig 8: the picture reveals slightly different brickwork in the last section of the terrace.

One aspect of the houses that remains a curiosity is that not many of the households chose to employ servants. Certainly, in the pre-Great War period, it would have been quite normal for such middle-class people to employ young girls to cook and clean for the family. While they did exist, Annie Hedley (aged 14 and a servant with the Lodges) and Annie Banks (aged 18 and working with the Waltons), were just two examples, there is no evidence from the census data that they were used extensively in the other houses. They could have lived locally. The Mawsons employed a live-in servant up the start of WW2. Cleaning out the coal fires, the only source of heating, as well as cooking and cleaning, would have been the major chores. We are indebted to Stephen Whaley who has allowed us to capture some original aspects of the houses which would have been familiar to householders and servants alike.



Fig 9: an original fireplace in a Wood View house.

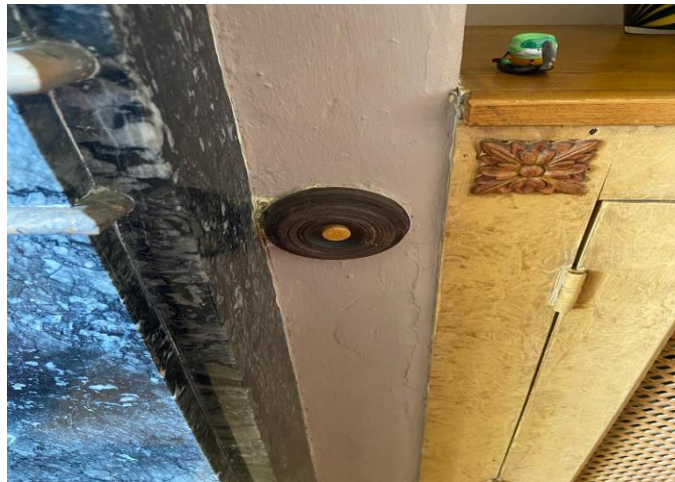


Fig 10: the servants' bell by the side of the fireplace.

Where the records exist via the census data, we can see that some of the girls were as young as fourteen when starting their first jobs "in service".

One of the renowned occupants of 2 Wood View was the carpet manufacturer, Laurie Mackay. He was the son of Hugh Mackay, the founder of that firm after he had taken over an ailing business which had once been a thriving concern in Durham. Laurie Mackay married Mildred, nee Ross, who was the daughter of a mining engineer, George Ross, at Hetton Colliery. The 1911 census shows us that they had one daughter, Dorothy, aged one, at this time as well as a servant, Christina Catherine Shetton, 17, who hailed from Cheshire. Close bonds must have been formed in the community and the Mackays and Mawsons appear to have enjoyed each other's company. The picture below was taken on 26th April 1919, only five months after the end of the Great War. It features, left to right, Alexander Cheyne, Mildred Mackay, Dorothy (in front), Laurie Mackay, Joseph Landt Mawson. Cheyne was a road engineer with Durham County Council and lived in 4 Roseacre, Shincliffe, at the time of this picture.



Fig 11: an outing in the country featuring Alexander Cheyne, The Mackays and Joseph Landt Mawson.

The Mackays later moved to Laxey Cottage and, after WW2, had The Croft built to their design. Amanda Stobbs has informed us that her grandfather had wavered between buying Laxey Cottage or 7 Wood View. He was beaten to the purchase of the former by his good friend, Laurie Mackay.

The Mackays were not the only manufacturing family living in the terrace during this period. George Blagdon, of Blagdon's Leather Works, resided in Number 6 and then Number 7. His family had been in the leather business for some years and perhaps he wished to escape the infernal stench the factory emitted when it was in full production. It was based by the river and was demolished in the 1960s to make way for the Millburngate Shopping area. George was used to living in decent accommodation throughout his earlier life. He had lived in Pelaw Terrace, a block of large houses that stood at right angles to Ravensworth Terrace in Durham. The Mawsons lived, first, in Number 5 and then Number Ten. Pelaw Terrace was demolished to make way for the A690 that now runs through the city centre. As well as living a comfortable middle-class life in Pelaw Terrace, George lived in Redhills Villa with his mother and father. It still stands, next to the Miners' Hall in Redhills, and is now student accommodation.



Fig 12: Redhills Villa in Redhills, Durham.

George's life, however, was not without tragedy or stress. He and his wife, Florence, lost their first child, also called George, before having another son a couple of years later. Florence was from Oswestry and had trained as a nurse when moving to Durham. A potential trigger for her leaving home was the fact that her mother made use, in 1900, of a recent law which allowed her to sue her husband for divorce on the grounds of cruelty. The case caused a scandal. Florence would later become a President of Shincliffe WI.

Our next inhabitant of the terrace probably deserves a whole book dedicated to his life and times. Luckily for us, one exists. *Durham Memories* by J Landt Mawson was edited by Amanda Stobbs, Landt's grand-daughter, and the pictures in it are from Landt's own collection as well as Michael Richardson's Gilesgate Archive. It is still available on Amazon and provides some interesting personal insights into his life and times in Durham and Shincliffe at the end of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. A review of the book appeared in [The Northern Echo](#) in 2013.

Mawson had followed his father into practising law after attending Durham School and Durham University. His Godfather was John Willan, a local farmer and JP who lived in Corner House in Shincliffe. The story surrounding his purchase of 7 Wood View was that he had been informed by his future in-laws that marriage to her daughter could only be assured if he was a man of property. In fact, Mawson went on to buy Number 6 for his in-laws just before WW2 when their house in Egglecliffe became too large to manage.

One of the curiosities of a document we have come across suggests that Robson may have been an extensive landlord of the properties on Wood View and Robson Terrace. It may seem odd to us these days that people would prefer to rent rather than buy. However, that was the position of most people until the growing trend to purchase one's own house really came to the fore after WW2.

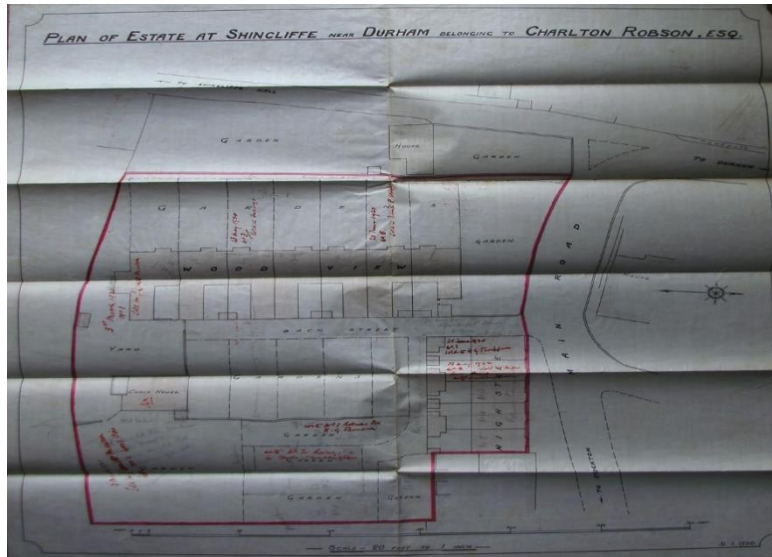


Fig 13: Plan of the estate at Shincliffe near Durham belonging to Charlton Robson Esq.

On the left-hand side of the document, it indicates, in writing: 3rd March 1921 No 1 Sold to J Landt Mawson. A closer inspection reveals that other houses were being sold off to various individuals. Robson by this time would have been in his eighties. He had moved to Newcastle and would have been aware of his impending mortality.

Mawson continued to develop the house and gardens. In our cover photo, he was the one who arranged for the shots to be taken. At the time of writing, it is being prepared for sale following the death of Amanda's mother who was the daughter of Mawson. It will end a century's association with the house. Mawson was an integral part of the village and was central to the British Legion's annual Remembrance Day march.



Fig 14: Mawson outside The Seven Stars. He is in the front row, fourth from the right.

Another person featured in the photograph above is Harry Appleton. He is on the back row, fourth from right. [Harry's story](#) is featured in some detail on our website. He was a Shincliffe man born and bred. Like Mawson, he served in the Great War and returned to be the Headmaster at Shincliffe C of E School in 1921. At some point in the late twenties and thirties, he occupied 4 Wood View, and we suspect that he may well have rented the property from the family of his mentor, John Morton Carr, Harry's teacher at school and his predecessor as Headmaster at the school. Carr died in 1928 and his family, four surviving daughters, must have moved out to pursue their own teaching careers.

Carr was certainly in the house in the 1911 census. However, as we have seen above, we cannot be certain whether he bought the property or rented it from the Charlton Robson estate. Mr Carr was a prominent person in the village. He, along with the Rector and the village policeman, would have been one of the most respected people in it. He was the Headmaster of the school for thirty-five years, almost matched by Harry Appleton who served for thirty-four.



Fig 15: Carr with Gertrude Barrass next to him. Lottie Dazeley is further to his right and Eliza Gallifant is on his left. The latter two had also been taught by Carr.

If Mawson can rightly lay claim to be the resident of Wood View who lived there the longest, then he could be challenged by the Fenny Family who remained in the house for something like sixty years. Samuel Fenny was a businessman who ran a "fancy goods" shop in Saddler Street, Durham. The shop building is still there, next to Bell's Fish Shop which faces on to the Market Square. The "fancy goods" involved leather bags which would have been bought by professional people in the city. The leather would have been "cured" by the Blagdons in their factory. The Fennys lived over the shop before they moved to Shincliffe. Fenny was an active politician and was a councillor of some renown for the St. Nicholas ward in the city. Fenny became the Mayor of Durham in 1902 but had to stand down following a stroke which debilitated him. He was replaced by his deputy. Two of his sons went on to run the business. Fanny Fenny was the last surviving member of the family, and she died in 1953. Such was the regard in which she was held in the village that a plaque was erected in her honour in St Mary's Church.

Each Mayor of Durham is commemorated in the Town Hall in the city centre and the one highlighting Fenny is pictured below.



Fig 16: the wooden carving in the Town Hall commemorating Samuel Fenny.

The story of Wood View does not end here. There are many episodes that could have been included. One such is James Menzies who lived at Number 2 and went on to be the clerk of the course at Shincliffe Racecourse. Or Joseph Snowball, an artist who went on to have some of his work displayed in prestigious galleries.

The terrace has had long associations with Durham University with various lecturers living there, a tradition that carries on today. Our website contains the memories of [Jenny Swann](#) (nee Elkan) whose own father worked at the university.

If you have your own memories of living there, and wish to share them with us, please get in contact at our email address: contact@slhs.uk. See Appendix 2 for more details.

Appendix 1

The following research has been undertaken by Steve Bryan, a committee member of SLHS, and provides some further context to the site of Wood View and Robson Terrace.

The plot of land on which the miners' cottages and Robson Terrace were constructed is of interest as it appears to have been, together with the Shincliffe Hall estate, a part of the only freehold land within Shincliffe not in the ownership of the Dean & Chapter. Arthur Mowbray's 1793 survey of D&C lands includes a map of the village that clearly labels the area and a broader strip running behind the south side of the High Street as 'Freehold'. See:

[Mirador Viewer \(durham.ac.uk\)](http://durham.ac.uk/mirador/viewer)

As it wasn't of direct concern to the D&C, Mowbray doesn't mention who owned the freehold at that time.

By the 1839 tithe apportionment the freeholding was in the hands of the Huttons, brothers George ('the Younger') and John. It appears that the Huttons' father, George Snr., acquired leasehold land below the village and towards the old Shincliffe Bridge sometime between 1799 and his death in 1813. He may also have acquired the freehold land in the village at the same time, while additionally holding property in Church Street and Sedgfield. The family were described as 'gardeners', which probably means they were growing both fruit and vegetables. There is certainly mention of orchards at Shincliffe and their land is variously listed as 'arable' or 'garden'. The tithe apportionment lists a John Reay as being the occupier of the freehold portion of Huttons' estate in the village, although I've yet to trace anything of him.

George Jr. died in 1850 and his will of 1847 makes no mention of freeholding at Shincliffe. This is to be expected, as it would seem the Huttons must have sold part of the freehold in the village to the colliery owners who built the miners' cottages on the site and may well have disposed of the remaining part at the same time. Presumably, this happened not long after the 1839 survey.

Robson's original plans (as shown above) indicate that there were plans for five houses. However, the OS map of 1895, published in 1897, indicates that six houses were built. The seventh must have been built between 1895 and 1901 when that year's census was taken.



Fig 17: Wood View (1895) is indicated by the arrow. Robson Terrace sits at right angles to it.

We can only speculate as to why this happened. Did Robson run out of money to build the seventh house? Did two of his neighbours, either from Cowdray House or The Croft (now Corner House) object to the building of a seventh property because it may have impinged on their view? The plot of land of current Number 1 was and is a relatively large one. At one point, it was large enough to host a tennis court. Mr Willan, a farmer living in The Croft at the time, may have requested to use the land for cattle but this is mere conjecture.

A further complication arises when one considers the brickwork at the back of Number 1. We are indebted to Stephen Whaley for the picture below.



Fig 18: Note the difference in the brickwork between Number 2 (on the left) and Number 1 (on the right).

Does this suggest that a different builder built the house but under the direction of Robson? Did he have to source the bricks from another brickworks because he had sold the Shincliffe Brick and Tile Works? Our work on this area continues. Finally, a glance at the back of Number 1 indicates its separate quality from the other houses. There is a sloping roof not featured in the other properties. This may add some credence that it was built by a different builder although the general plan of the others has been followed.

Appendix 2

Jenny Swann (nee Elkans) informs us that two of her friends from her childhood were Jane and Lisa Carruthers. They grew up in Number 3. The next couple to occupy the house were Richard (Dick) Morley and his wife, Mary Sales. Jenny recalls that Mary kept her maiden name, the first woman she had ever met who decided to keep her own name after marriage. [Dick Morley](#) died at his home on 10/9/22, aged ninety-two.

Elizabeth Ayres (nee Kingston) tells us that her mother and father were good friends with Mr and Mrs Weston who lived at Number 1. Bill Weston was the brother of Mike Weston, an England rugby international in the 1960s. Mike's sons, Phil, and Robin, both played first-class county cricket.

Bill, ex-Durham School boy, used to come up to High Butterby (Elizabeth's parents farmed there) as an agricultural student, then later to shoot. Many dinner parties were shared at each other's houses over the years. They were younger than dad and mum.

His wife at the time worked in County Hall for many years and secured holiday jobs for me there when I was a student. They sold their beautiful house in Wood View. Bill married Sally who owned the [Traveller's Rest, Claypath, Durham](#). (It has been converted to private accommodation but has gained Grade 2 listed status.) They lived just outside Pittington in a grand house (Sally probably still lives there). They had two children, William and Sophie.

[Bill Weston died on 11/3/2019.](#)

I still have the beautiful flower urn he bought mum from the antiques shop at the bottom of the steps in Durham for feeding him suppers when he was younger! It holds our Christmas poinsettia each year and I always think of him.



Fig 19: flower urn presented to Mr and Mrs Kingston by Bill Weston who lived at Number 1.

In addition to the invaluable material provided above by Amanda Stobbs, she has also revealed one or more names of the people who have lived in the terrace.

Another Wood View connection - my parents moved into number one (also owned by my grandfather; he'd previously rented it to [Colonel Dillon](#), who had retired to Shincliffe, and subsequently moved into St Mary's Close once that was built) in about 1960, and we lived there off and on 'til the mid-1960s. I remember when I was very small being very proud of being allowed to walk up the Back Street on my own to visit my grandparents at the far end!*

*Other university lecturers in Wood View: [Bill Fisher was one](#)** , who lived with his mother. There was a bit of a local joke in the late 50s or early 60s, when he built a pond in his garden "perhaps they want to take up fishing!" [A pun on his surname! Found that snippet in one of the letters from my grandmother to my mother, but I can't at this moment remember the exact year, I'm afraid. But between 1959 and 1965).*

*Colonel Norman Margrave "Mark" Dillon (1896-1997) is commemorated in St. Mary's. The hyperlink above will take the reader to the Imperial War Museum's records where Colonel Dillon can be heard recalling his experiences on WW1. He was, from all accounts, quite a character. The Reverend Stephen Sandham recalls that Colonel Dillon would have three parties to celebrate his birthday: one for "officers", one for "men", and one for "civilians".

**Bill Fisher was a renowned academic at Durham University. So much so that his funeral took place in the Cathedral.