

THOMAS VINCENT HOLBECH

(Sutton Coldfield's First Town Clerk)

Born: 27th February 1846
Died: 16 January 1904

Janet Jordan
Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group
February 2007

Introduction

For 20 years (it seemed like 40!), I used to join the throng of commuters leaving from Sutton Coldfield Railway Station for Birmingham City Centre at 8.00 o'clock every weekday morning. Most days, we stood, side by side, facing the track, glumly preparing ourselves for the journey and workday ahead of us. In the winter, if the waiting room was open and the heater was working (joy of joys!), we all flocked inside to keep warm. Two enormous benches, which I reckoned to be as old as the station building (1884), were soon occupied and the miserable expressions soon brightened. For me, this vision never altered, until I came across some old newscuttings, which made me view that waiting room in a different light.

It was 'The Sutton Coldfield News' of Saturday, January 23, 1904, which reported on the death of Thomas Vincent Holbeche, Sutton's First Town Clerk. His last dying hours were spent in that waiting room, probably stretched out on one of the benches and suffering from the awful effects of a heart attack, away from his wife and home.

I often thought afterward, as I sat there, how swiftly time passes! In those surroundings, it didn't feel to me as if 100 years had gone by since that sad event and yet the Sutton Coldfield which Tom had served so well had changed in 100 different ways. Was his working day so different from ours in the Twentieth Century? Did he suffer the 'stress' we all complain of these days, in carrying out his duties? Of course he did, and this, maybe, is what killed him at such an early age! Certainly, afterwards, the Town Council decided that his successor should be a whole time official in order to deal with the increasing responsibilities of the Corporation.

Thomas Vincent Holbeche may not be one of Sutton's better known characters, but his influence on the town in the late 1800s seems to have been remarkable and he deserves to be remembered.

This is his story:-

*Janet Jordan
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THOMAS VINCENT HOLBECHE

Sutton Coldfield's First Town Clerk

To his younger brother, Richard, Tom was *“the great man, if a little arbitrary”*. Whether Tom took this attribute into adulthood, as a respected Solicitor and Town Clerk to Sutton Coldfield Town Council, seems unlikely. Rather, one would have expected him to be single minded and positive as befitted the path of his life as the eldest child, destined to carry on the family's legal tradition.

Many years after his birth, his Aunt Sarah, in the flowery speech of her day (the late 1860s) wrote in her diary:

“1846, Feb 27 - Thos Vincent our first nephew born and like other first nephews, of course, the finest and most wonderful; his growth hitherto has not disappointed us, either in mind or manhood, may he continue as he promises, a blessing to others and himself, blest with all that constitutes a good, useful and happy man.”

So, it seems, **she** was pleased at the way he had turned out!

His grandfather, a solicitor, who helped to establish the family legal firm in the early 1800s, was called Thomas. His father, also a solicitor, was called Vincent. No wonder Tom was christened Thomas Vincent. His mother, Emma Addenbrooke, came from a well respected Sutton family and, dutifully, she produced 7 children. Tom's siblings were Edward (Ted), Richard (Dick), Aemillian (Mill), Gertrude and Arthur (twins) and Edith.

He was born in the pretty, but isolated, Park House (now within Sutton Park, near Town Gate) which was surrounded by fields and trees. This family drawing depicts a couple of children in the back garden and one assumes that Tom is the one being pulled along in a cart, probably by his nursemaid. Aunt Elizabeth (Sarah's sister), who was blind, is sitting down.



Rear of Park House 1846

In 1848 his father inherited the family home at 3 Coleshill Street and it was in that rather odd collection of house, office and tythe barn that he grew up.



Coleshill Street, Sutton Coldfield, 1887

He didn't leave a diary, unlike his brother Richard and Aunt Sarah. From their recollections and other information found in the Holbeche family papers, one would imagine that he had a very happy childhood. No doubt he was acquainted with most of the townspeople described by Richard and got up to all the same sort of childhood mischief as his brother!



One of his abilities was to catch rabbits, knowing exactly what holes they might be in – Richard remembered him lying on his side with his arm up a hole, their dogs looking on with every appearance of confidence! Another of his skills, this recalled by his Aunt, was shooting birds.

Thomas Holbeche – 2 years old?

There seems to have been a close bond between the generations, and the Holbeche children and their Aunts (of whom there were seven, living together at the top of High Street) met constantly. Apparently, on one occasion:

"[Thomas] Vincent and a few other festive spirits once paid us a visit there with banjos, bones, etc., all complete. They danced so violently that a fine china bowl slipped off the piano and was broken."

The family was obviously financially secure. This explains how Tom (and his younger brothers) were able to go as boarders to Miss Thrupps' Preparatory School at Moseley. Around 1853/4, he went to Bishop Vesey's Grammar School where, to gain admission, he was required to do two sums - £78496. 18. 8d. divided by 8 and £4862. 14. 2½d. less £3954. 11. 4¾d. - and to copy a sentence, to prove an ability to write. One of the sentences chosen was "Bestow your bounty on deserving persons". After that, he spent a while at Rugby School and then on to London. Eventually, he became an articled clerk in his father's firm, Holbeche & Addenbrooke. After his father's death, his Uncle Henry Addenbrooke took him on as partner in 1868.

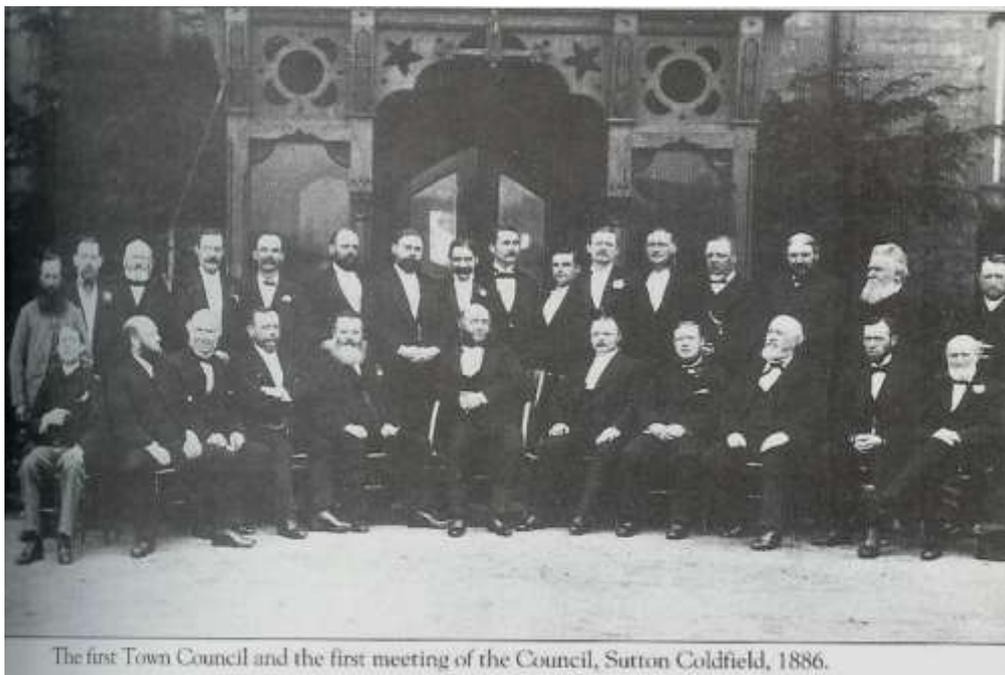


Tom, as a young man ...



and a few years later

Eleven years later, on Monday, 6th January 1879 he got married at the Parish Church of Elford to Mary Turner Smith, widow of James Thomas Smith, surgeon of Sutton Coldfield, and eldest daughter of Edward Kendrick of Weeford. Those early married years were probably spent gaining experience in the law and maintaining the coveted position of 'Holbeche and Addenbrooke' as Deputy Stewards and Solicitors to the Warden & Society (the Town Council of the day). When the borough became a Corporation, this position paved the way for his election as Town Clerk on 28 April 1886. At that time, they paid him £125 per annum.

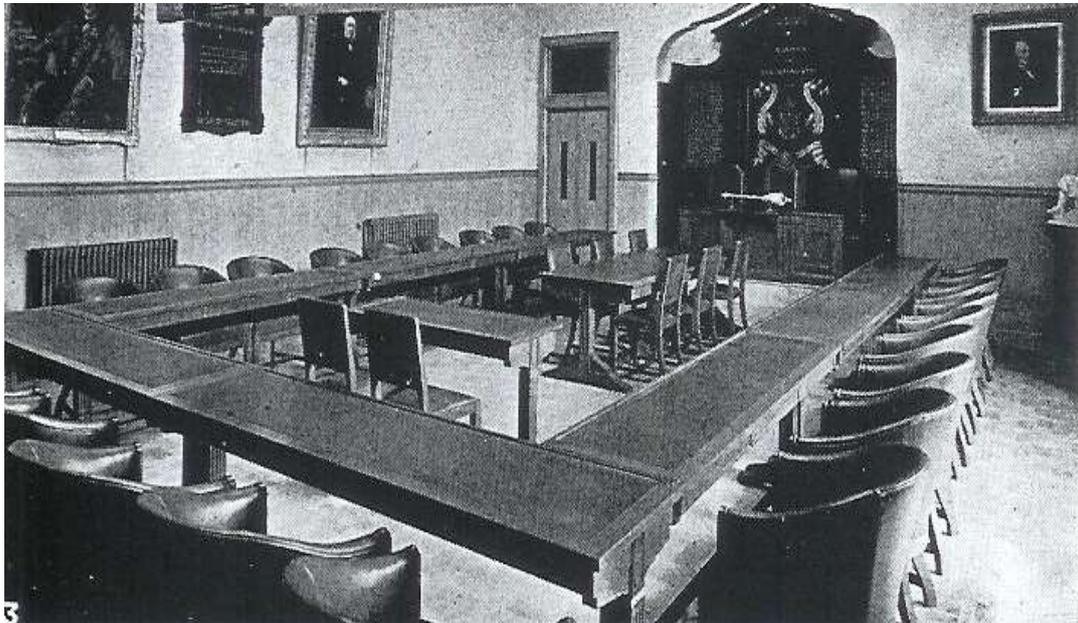


*The first Town Council and the first meeting of the Council, Sutton Coldfield, 1886
Thomas Vincent Holbeche – back, centre, facing to his left*

The Town Council met monthly, on Wednesday at 3.00 pm, and Tom became responsible for the Minutes, which, as the years went by, expanded with the growth of the Town. Early on, some examples of the items recorded were: the formation of a Volunteer Fire Brigade; a major scheme for providing water to flush sewers and clean the streets (costing approximately £3,500); the purchase of a Steam Road Roller (not exceeding £500) and the

new Free Library. These years for Tom must have been exhilarating, as Sutton was in its heyday and this was a time when much of the infrastructure of the Victorian Town was established.

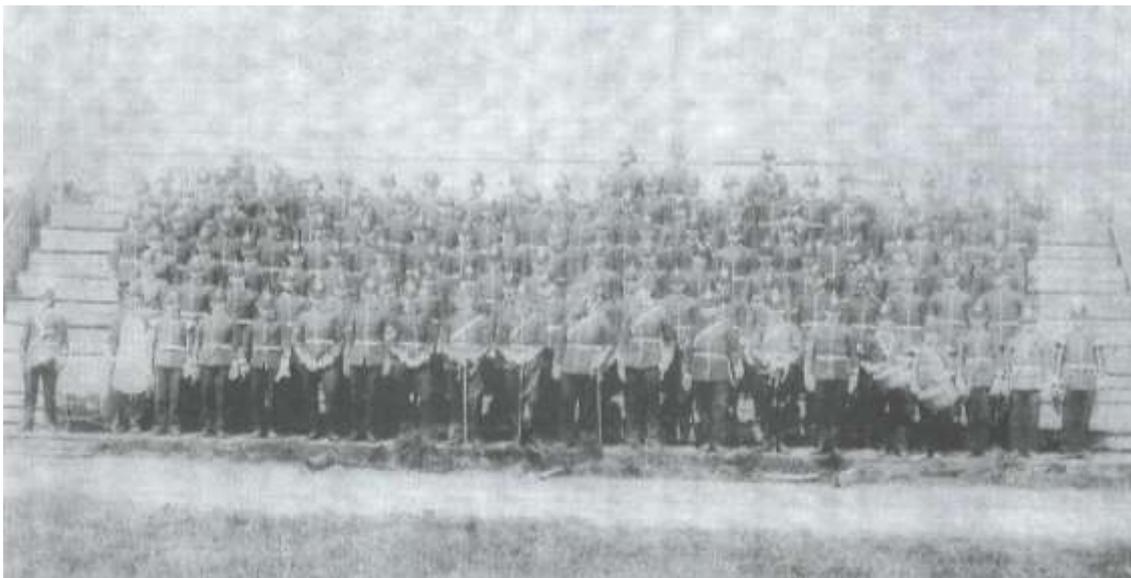
A unique honour for him in 1887, was to be signatory with J.B. Stone, the Lord Mayor, on behalf of the Town Council, to a letter of address presented to Queen Victoria congratulating her on the occasion of her Jubilee. Sutton Coldfield, of course, was a “Royal” Town , its Charter given by her predecessor, King Henry VIII.



The Council Chamber

In 1891, Tom was living with his wife at The Cottage, Maney and then in 1891 at Wentworth House, Doe Bank. Both houses had a certain presence in Sutton Coldfield, as did all the Holbeche homes.

As the years went by, Tom's personal involvement with the town gradually increased as he joined other organisations. Not long after his marriage, he was one of the first to enlist in 1880 as a Volunteer and prominent member of the Sutton or 'F' Company of 1st Volunteer Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment (see Appendix). His personal details were recorded in the Muster Roll as follows: Height 5'9³/₄"", Chest 38¹/₂", Age 34. He resigned on 30th December 1891.



*'F' Company, 1st Volunteer Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment
(The Sutton Rifle Volunteers)*

Tom – Front row, 7th from the left?

The new Provident Dispensary at the corner of Rectory Road and Coleshill Street must also have been thankful for his interest. When their foundation stone was laid on 27th June 1888, Tom had already agreed to be one of the guarantors to the Bank for any overdraft needed to build it.



The Dispensary, Sutton Coldfield, Jubilee Memorial 1890

The following list of other groups with which he was associated makes one wonder how he found time to fit in his Town Clerk's duties:-

The Sutton Coldfield Club.
Trinity Working Men's Club.
Lloyds Bank, Sutton Coldfield
Jesson's Trust
Eye Hospital, Birmingham
The Birmingham Law Society.
Birmingham Conservative Club
Sutton Parish Church
The Education Committee
Freemasons - The Warden Lodge.
St. Peter's, Maney Parish Church

From this, one can imagine him to be a very busy, perhaps official, sort of person. What a revelation, then, to read the following newspaper reports found pasted into Richard Holbeche's 'Petty Cash Book' kept with the family papers! These portray him, instead, as very approachable and warm hearted and as a man who ought to feature more prominently in Sutton's roll of honour!

THE NEWS

SATURDAY, JANUARY 23, 1904.

THOMAS VINCENT HOLBECHÉ

Although many warm tributes have already been paid to the worth and work of the late Town Clerk, whose untimely decease we are all this week mourning, we do not think that the removal from among us of so prominent a citizen, one whose name was truly a household word in Sutton, should be allowed to pass without notice in our columns. In the minds of the older residents the name of Holbeche was inseparably associated with the town, and the lamented death of the Town Clerk severs, as the Deputy Mayor eloquently pointed out this week, yet another link with the Sutton of the past. To the newer dwellers, those who have taken up their abodes within the Royal Town since it began to increase so rapidly, the name of Holbeche will have meant but little. With such he will have been regarded as simply a necessary appendage to all well-constituted boroughs. But to all those who in any way were brought habitually into contact with him, Mr Holbeche, though his merits were concealed under a singularly modest and unobtrusive bearing, was felt to be one of the most warm-hearted, the most conscientious, and the most devoted to its interests, of all those who have been born and bred in the town.

In the loss of prominent citizens Sutton Coldfield, during the last few years, has been peculiarly unfortunate. We are only in the fourth year of the twentieth century, yet every year has seen the passing of some resident closely associated with the Sutton of a former day. In the first year of the new century the last Warden of Sutton Coldfield, Dr. Duncalfe, died full of years and honour. In the following year Mr. Henry Addenbrooke, another honoured citizen and

one intimately connected with the gentleman whose loss we are now deploring, was borne to his rest, and in 1903 he was followed by Mr. T. S. Eddowes, whose career was also closely bound up with the town for over fifty years. In less than four years, therefore, four well-known names - none better known or more highly esteemed - have disappeared from the roll of Sutton's burgesses.

It would be impossible to further dwell on the great loss which the town has sustained without almost using the wording of the eloquent tributes which have this week been paid to the member of Thomas Vincent Holbeche by the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, and other magistrates, and Mr. J. C. Skelton. In all these there was no word of flattery, and they painted the Town Clerk to the life. We may say, however, if there was one thing connected with Mr. Holbeche, which stamped itself on the minds of all classes in the borough, it was that in the fullest sense of the word he was a gentleman. A great deal could be said on this score, but perhaps nothing could better sum up all that in Thomas Vincent Holbeche was comprised in the word 'gentleman' than the beautiful lines of Mr. O Donohue, which were recited on a public platform in Sutton last year, and possibly in Mr. Holbeche's presence:-

*What is a gentleman? Is it not one
Knowing instinctively what he should shun,
Speaking no word that can injure or pain,
Spreading no scandal and deepening no stain;
One who knows how to put each at his ease,
Striving incessantly how he shall please,
One who can tell by a glance at your cheek,
When to be silent, and when he should
speak?*

*What is a gentleman: Is it not one
Eating the bread he has honestly won?
Living uprightly, fearing his God,
Leaving no stain on the path he has trod,
Caring not whether his hand may be hard,
Stretching it boldly to claim its reward,
Recking not whether his garments be old,
Prizing sincerity far above gold?*

*What is a gentleman? Say, is it birth
Makes a man noble or adds to his worth,
Is there a family tree to be had
Shady enough to conceal what is bad?
Show me the man who makes conscience his
guide,*

*Who has nothing to blush for and nothing to hide,
And be a noble, or be he in trade,
That is the gentleman nature has made."*

It is often when a man feels at his best, when he is full of vigour that he is struck down. Throughout last week the Town Clerk appeared in more than ordinary good health. Always cheerful, during the last days of his life he was even 'jolly'. That is the expressive word used to me by one who knew him well.

On Friday night – the day before the fatal Saturday – he was at the Social Club and played a game of billiards with great gusto – the last game, he ever played, and in reply to a friend who politely enquired after his health, he said emphatically that he felt 'very well'.

DEATH OF MR. T.V. HOLBECHÉ.

Unexpected ending of a busy life.

Probably throughout the centuries that Sutton Coldfield has been A Royal Town and in the old time before that it has never received a greater shock than on Saturday afternoon last when a report spread through the borough that the respected Town Clerk (Mr. T.V. Holbeche) had passed away. Even to those – and they were comparatively few – who knew that Mr. Holbeche had that morning been attacked by illness and had lain for hours in a serious condition at the Sutton (L. and N.W.) Railway Station, the news came with painful suddenness. Most people who had heard a rumour in the forenoon that the Town Clerk had had an attack of illness and had alighted in consequence at the station from the train from Four Oaks in which he was traveling, did not imagine for a moment that his indisposition was of so grave a character, or if it was, that the end would come so soon and with such appalling quickness. When it became known throughout the town, shortly after three o'clock, that Mr. Holbeche had expired at his residence at Doe Bank, Four Oaks, in most cases the news was received with incredulity. Mr. Holbeche was so well known a personage in Sutton so familiar a figure, so regular in his public appearances, and one with whom

everyone had insensibly associated the idea of average good health, that at first the Sutton public refused to believe that he has passed for ever from among them. This was particularly the case with those who knew him well, and who were in frequent association with him. It seemed impossible to credit that the man who on Friday evening was outwardly in good health and apparently in the best of spirits should on the morrow have passed the Great Beyond. And even when a week has elapsed and all that is mortal of Thomas Vincent Holbeche has been laid to rest, to many of his familiar friends it will still seem a dream, a something which will not fit in with their daily life.

Like many men who work hard, throughout the week, who have weighty matters on their mind with their attendant worries, Mr. Holbeche had been accustomed for some time past to throw aside the cares of business on the Saturdays and take a complete rest and holiday. Along with some friends he had rented some shooting at Brealey, near Stratford-on-Avon, and of late had usually gone there on a Saturday for a day's shooting. With this object in view, he took the 8.45 train from Four Oaks on Saturday morning last, but feeling unwell after he entered the carriage, he alighted on reaching Sutton Coldfield. Dr. Frazer's groom happening to be at the station, Mr. Holbeche asked him to fetch the doctor at once, and then went into the waiting room on the platform, this being the platform nearest to Station Street. On the doctor's arrival, he found the Town Clerk in a serious condition, so much so that all thought of the day's expedition had to be abandoned. Dr. Frazer did all that medical skill could suggest to cope with the heart affection from which Mr. Holbeche was suffering, everything especially being done to induce circulation and warmth. The waiting room was kept private, a police-constable being placed near the door in order to avoid Mr. Holbeche being disturbed by visitors. The deceased gentleman did not lose consciousness, and spoke several times to Dr. Frazer, who remained with him throughout, and to the Deputy Town Clerk (Mr. T. Ellison), who later in the forenoon was permitted to enter the room. Mr. Holbeche then spoke with all his old kindness of manner, and his intellect was unclouded. No improvement being manifested in his condition, it was resolved to convey Mr. Holbeche to his residence in Wentworth Road. The police ambulance was procured, and on it Mr. Holbeche was placed in the 1.10 p.m. train. He was accompanied by Dr.

Frazer and Mr. T. Ellison. On arrival at his residence Mr. Holbeche was at once put to bed, and every effort was made by rubbing, etc., to promote circulation and warmth. Unfortunately, all that was done proved unavailing, and the Town Clerk passed away shortly after three o'clock.

Mrs. Holbeche was then at Buxton. The said news of her husband's illness was telegraphed to her, but she was unable to reach Sutton Coldfield until all was over.

The late Town Clerk was born in the year 1847 (1846!) and was therefore in his fifty-eighth year. Himself one of the best known and most respected men in Sutton, he was the son of the late Mr. Thomas [Vincent!] Holbeche, in his time equally well known and as highly esteemed. The same may be said with equal truth of the deceased's grandfather, also a Thomas Holbeche, who in his day and generation well served the town. All three were solicitors, practicing in Sutton. The late Mr. Thomas Vincent Holbeche was born in the town and received his education at Bishop Vesey's Grammar School and at Rugby. He was articled to his father and, after his death, became joint deputy steward along with the late Mr. Henry Addenbrooke, his father's partner. The quaint document appointing Messrs. Addenbrooke and Holbeche, Deputy Stewards of The Manor of Sutton Coldfield, and intimating the Queen's gracious approval of such appointment, is still to be seen at the Town Clerk's office.

As years rolled on, the Warden and Society of the ancient town and the Deputy Stewards were abolished, and, as every Suttonian knows, or ought to know, Sutton Coldfield became in 1886 a municipal borough, governed by a Mayor and Town Council. Mr. Holbeche was thought the most fitting person to undertake the duties of Town Clerk. He was accordingly unanimously appointed and discharged the office with, as we all know, the greatest credit to himself up to the day of his death.

With the incorporation of the town came a division of the ancient trusts into municipal and charitable. Mr. Holbeche was appointed clerk to the Interim Charity Trustees, which subsequently became the Municipal Charities Trustees. In this capacity the deceased did excellent work. In regard to matters which came before the new Council and the Trustees, both of whose work from the first steadily increased, Mr. Holbeche's legal knowledge and acumen were of the greatest value. Both authorities indeed had every reason to congratulate themselves that they had selected Mr. Holbeche as their legal

adviser, and on numerous occasions, down almost to the day of his lamented and unexpected death, the Town Clerk and Clerk to the Trustees abundantly justified their choice and by his advice rendered the most important service to his native place. Mr. Holbeche was only formally re-appointed clerk to the Trustees at the quarterly meeting, held on the week before his death.

Along with the late Mr. Henry Addenbrooke with whom he shared the duties, Mr. Holbeche was also appointed clerk to the borough justices. As time went on, however, advancing years made Mr. Addenbrooke less regular in his attendances at the Petty Sessions, and the duties latterly were undertaken solely by Mr. Holbeche. As magistrates' clerk, as in other positions which he held, his legal knowledge proved of the utmost value to the sitting justices. In conducting every case, trivial or important, Mr. Holbeche was quietly effective and above all scrupulously impartial alike to defendants and complainants and in undefended cases he never failed to elicit all the facts in favour of the accused.

Following the formation of the Education Committee as the result of the passing of the Education Bill of 1902 Mr. Holbeche received the appointment of clerk to that body, his recommendation by the committee having been unanimously confirmed by the Town Council as the local Education Authority at their monthly meeting on the 6th inst. Ever since its establishment the Education Committee has had most troublesome questions to deal with, prominent among these being the proposed transfer to them of the borough elementary schools, administered by the Charities Trustees. The question was originally brought forward in February last, and both in its legal bearings and from other points of view has been a great source of trouble and anxiety. As may be remembered it was so far settled by the Trustees at their last meeting deciding to hand over their schools and school buildings to the local Education Authority. There is too much reason to fear that the worry attending this vexed question had its effect on the Town Clerk, and this, too, at the close of a year which saw the abortive attempt of the Town Council to obtain Parliamentary powers for the construction of tramways in the borough and the consequent severe criticism to which the Corporation were subjected.

In addition to taking an active part in the social life of the town Mr. Holbeche was a general supporter of local institutions. He

was a member of the committee of the Sutton Coldfield Dispensary and of the Nursing Institution. He was one of the founders and one of the trustees also of the Sutton Coldfield club in which he took a deep interest. About twelve months ago Mr. Holbeche presented to the Club a portrait of the King in the costume of a country gentleman and bearing the simple inscription: 'Presented by Thomas V. Holbeche'. The gift has always been greatly appreciated; but it is almost needless to say how much more it will be thought of now that the giver has passed away. Mr. Holbeche was also much interested in the Trinity Working Men's Club, and was almost invariably to be seen at their annual meetings. The annual gathering of the Club took place on Wednesday evening, and we believe was the second since its foundation at which the Town Clerk was not present.

Among other offices held by Mr. Holbeche was that of solicitor to Lloyds Bank, Sutton Coldfield. He also acted as Clerk to Jesson's Trust until that charity was incorporated with the other local charities by the last scheme of the Charity Commissioners. He was a member of the Committee of the Eye Hospital, Birmingham, and of the committee of the Birmingham Law Society. In politics he was a Conservative, and a member of the Birmingham Conservative Club.

Mr. Holbeche was a regular attendant at Sutton Parish Church, where he acted as sidesman and fulfilled his duties as such on the Sunday before his death. His family pew was in the right gallery, looking towards the chancel, and it was not often that he was absent from his accustomed seat.

Earlier in life Mr. Holbeche was a Volunteer and a prominent member of the Sutton or the 'F' Company of the 1st ~Volunteer Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment. As first lieutenant, he became eventually captain, and occupied the position for some years. He was also a Freemason, and acted for some years as secretary of the Warden Lodge. An enthusiastic sportsman, he was for several years a member of the South Staffordshire Hunt, and, as we have seen, it was on his way to a day's shooting that he was seized with the illness which was so speedily to carry him off.

The Town Clerk's last public appearance was on Tuesday, the 12th inst., when he officiated at the Sutton Police Court as usual as Magistrates' Clerk. He then appeared in his ordinary health, and conducted the business of the Court with his customary thoroughness and ability. He also attended in his official capacity the meeting of

the Town Council on the 6th inst., already referred to, and the quarterly meeting of the Trustees on the following evening. Along with Mrs. Holbeche, he was present at the performances of the Christmas pantomime in the Masonic Hall on New Year's Eve, and appeared to thoroughly enjoy the fun.

Both as a solicitor and as a public official, the late Mr. Holbeche had solid gifts, which were felt and recognised by all who had any dealings with him. But he was a singularly modest and unassuming man and the modern virtue of self-assertion evidently found scant favour in his sight. A man given rather to act than to talk, but when called upon to speak he could do so forcibly and to the point. All who were acquainted with him were impressed by his conscientiousness, and it has been truly said of him that whoever went to him for advice, in whatever rank of life, obtained the very best which Mr. Holbeche, according to his ability, had to give. He was singularly warm-hearted and approachable, always kindly and cheerful, and ever ready to say a kind word. Above all, he was by nature emphatically a gentleman, of a kind that is not often met with, accompanied by wealth or position. This was a trait in his character which none could fail to notice, and which, joined to his kindness of heart, gave him a warm place in the feelings of all who were habitually brought into contact with him.

Mr. Holbeche leaves three brothers, these being Colonel R. Holbeche, now in India; Mr. A.E. Holbeche, of Loughborough; and Dr. Holbeche, of Malvern; and two sisters, namely, Miss G. Holbeche, of Sutton, and Mrs. Burrows, of Burgess Hill, Sussex.

At the service on Sunday morning at the Parish Church, the Rector (the Rev. W. C. R. Bedford), in the course of his sermon, which dealt with the 'gold, frankincense, and myrrh', offered by the Magi to the Babe at Bethlehem (Matt.II.,11), paid a brief but eloquent tribute to the deceased gentleman. The gift of myrrh, he said, was symbolic of the death which the Saviour should die. He had intended in that connection to speak of the uncertainty of life, but when he returned to Sutton on the previous day he learned that this lesson had been brought forcibly home to them, that one who the last Sunday on which he (the Rector) officiated in that church had discharged his duty as sidesman, had been

taken away with appalling suddenness. As for himself, he had known him from his earliest years. He bore one of the most honoured names in that town, and he honestly believed he never did an unkind action or said an unjust word. All who knew him must deplore his loss and sympathise with true, heartfelt sorrow with those dear ones who were left to mourn his death. Let not the shock of this sudden rending of the chords of life in one so well known to us all be but the cause of sad regrets, but rather let us seek in the innermost recesses of our hearts to inquire whether we are prepared to pass to the Great Beyond.”

MAGISTERIAL TRIBUTES

At the Sutton Coldfield Petty Sessions, on Tuesday, several warm tributes to the character of the deceased gentleman were paid by the sitting magistrates. There was a full Bench, which included the Mayor (Councillor R. H. Sadler), the Deputy Mayor (Councillor C. Vale), Dr. A.H. Evans, Aldermen Seal, Glover, and Emery, and Mr. F. Parkes.

Before the business of the Court was entered upon the Mayor said those present would no doubt anticipate the remarks he was about to make with reference to the great loss which Sutton Coldfield and more particularly that Court had sustained since it last met, in the death of the deeply lamented and respected Clerk to the Justices. Like himself, Mr. Holbeche had been born and bred in the borough, and he was sure there was no man more honoured or more respected than the late Thomas Vincent Holbeche. He was now speaking in a two fold capacity. He was a very young Magistrate, having only had the privilege of meeting their Clerk for two months, but he had had many opportunities of being immediately in contact with him. He (the Mayor) was also the oldest practitioner in that Court, having first practiced there about thirty-one years ago, and during the whole of that time Mr. Holbeche had occupied the position of magistrates' clerk. He felt at the present time that no words of his could express the very great loss which he personally and also the borough and that Court had sustained. He was sure they would only be doing what every citizen of Sutton would be doing when they deeply sympathized with the family of the late Mr. Holbeche in their sad and terrible bereavement.

Alderman Glover said he wished to associate himself with every word that had fallen from the mouth of the Mayor. A more honourable or more straightforward gentleman than Mr. Holbeche never existed. They all felt his loss personally, and publicly it was almost irreparable. He had been associated with Mr. Holbeche for something over thirty years, and he could truthfully say he had never spoken to or met a more high-minded or more true-hearted gentleman. He deeply regretted, as the whole town would regret, Mr. Holbeche's loss.

Dr. Evans said he could only re-echo what had been said by the Mayor and Alderman Glover as to the high qualities of their lamented friend. He had been a magistrate since 1886, and he had always found Mr. Holbeche highly conscientious, very careful in giving his opinions, and always impartial in giving a prisoner the benefit of any doubt that might exist. Mr. Holbeche was courteous to a degree, and a perfect gentleman, and his place would be very difficult to fill. As a personal friend he felt his loss most keenly.

LETTER FROM THE LORD MAYOR OF BIRMINGHAM

The following letter from the Lord Mayor of Birmingham (Alderman Hallewell Rogers) has been received by the Mayor of Sutton Coldfield: - City of Birmingham, Lord Mayor's Parlour, the Council House, 18th January 1904. Dear Mr. Mayor, - Will you allow me on behalf of the Council and citizens of Birmingham to convey to you and your colleagues our sincere sympathy with you on the loss you have sustained by the sudden death of your Town Clerk, Mr. Holbeche. Knowing, as I do, the importance of securing for municipal administration capable and reliable advisers, I can fully appreciate the sense of loss you in Sutton Coldfield will feel by the removal of such a well tried and valued officer. - I am, yours faithfully, HALLEWELL ROGERS, Lord Mayor, His Worship the Mayor, Sutton Coldfield.

SUTTON CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

The Mayor also received the following from the Rev. F. W. Collyer, of the Sutton Coldfield Congregational Church: - January 17th, 1904. Dear Mr. Sadler, - I should like to express to

you my sorrow and sympathy with you and your colleagues in the loss that the town has sustained through the sudden death of our much respected Town Clerk, Mr. T. V. Holbeche. It will be indeed a trying time for you and the Council, and I should like you to be assured that you have the confidence and sympathy of some of us, who cannot take civic responsibility, but who have a deep sense of its worth and good. It is not cant when I say I pray for your guidance and direction in the difficulties so sudden and sad a loss will entail. – Faithfully yours,
FRANK W. COLLYER.

VOTES OF CONDOLENCE

Before the commencement of the committee meeting at the Council House on Tuesday evening, in connection with the scheme for the erection of a church at Maney, the Chairman (Mr. Herbert Lloyd) said he did not think they should begin their ordinary business without expressing their regret at the lamented death of Mr. T. Vincent Holbeche, and moving a vote of condolence with his widow. Mr. Holbeche was not only a very good Churchman and sidesman, but in the past was very much connected with Maney Church. He was also a subscriber to the Maney Church Fund, and one of the guarantors to the proposed loan in connection with it. - The Rector, in supporting the resolution, said they all felt this too deeply for him to say much on the subject. In the matter of the Maney Church Fund, Mr. Holbeche had generally acted as their solicitor. He was sure they all joined most deeply in heartfelt sympathy for his widow in her affliction. - The resolution was then carried in silence.

At the annual meeting of the Trinity Working Men's Club, on Wednesday evening, the Rector (the president of the Club), said before they began the business he felt he must say a word as to the great loss which the Club, together with all institutions in Sutton Coldfield, had received through the death of their esteemed friend and fellow member, Mr. T. V. Holbeche. Some of them might remember that Mr. Holbeche was the owner of that property when the club was started. He was the first man he (the Rector) went to when he had in his mind what many people thought was a rather wild scheme – that of a Working Men's Club. Mr. Holbeche came and looked over the building with him. He was most kind and encouraging, and helped him

(the Rector) in every possible way. Certainly, they owned a very great deal to Mr. Holbeche in the starting of the club. He took a keen interest in it, and up to the day of his death was an honorary subscriber. When any appeal was made to Mr. Holbeche in connection with the club, he always met with a ready response. The loss of such a man was not easily realised by those amongst whom he lived. Because he was quiet, and unostentatious, many, he thought, were not aware how much kindness of heart, how much readiness to help all that was good was in Mr. Holbeche. As time went by they would all feel, he was sure, that his death was a very great loss to them all. The Rector concluded by moving, on behalf of the members, that they offer to Mrs. Holbeche their sincere condolence and that the secretary be asked to wait on her and express their grief at the death of their fellow members, Thomas Vincent Holbeche, and their deep sympathy with her in her bereavement. – Mr. J. C. Skelton, in seconding the resolution, said Mr. Holbeche was a man whom to know was to respect, nay more, to love. He was a man who made no foes, and he did not think he had an enemy in Sutton Coldfield. - The vote was unanimously passed in silence.

THE FUNERAL

It was amid bleak and damp weather, with lowering clouds threatening rain, that all that was mortal of Thomas Vincent Holbeche, first Town Clerk of the municipal borough of Sutton Coldfield, was on Wednesday afternoon laid to rest in the family vault in the churchyard of Holy Trinity Parish Church. The funeral cortege, consisting of a hearse and six coaches, left the deceased's residence in Wentworth Road, Doe Bank, shortly after two o'clock, and made its slow way along Lichfield Road. Throughout the line of route there were numerous spectators, who watched with respectful interest. No token of respect was wanting to show in what esteem the deceased gentleman was held. Blinds were everywhere lowered, and there was a subdued feeling abroad which betokened that it was a time of general mourning. At the foot of King Edward's Square the cortege halted to allow of the Mayor (Councillor R. H. Sadler, J.P.), Aldermen, Councillors, and others to precede it to the church. The procession, which had a most impressive effect, marched in the following order: - Mace-bearers, the Mayor

and Deputy Mayor (Councillor C. Vale, J.P.), Aldermen, Borough Justices, Councillors, officials of the Corporation, and heads of departments, Municipal Trustees, Governors of the Grammar School, members of the Education Committee outside the Council, Sutton Volunteers, Sutton police, and representatives of various societies. As the procession approached the top of Mill St., there was a large crowd gathered, and Coleshill Street, through which the cortege passed and Mill Street itself was also alive with spectators. Never indeed have the burial rites of a citizen of the Royal Town aroused a stronger interest among its inhabitants. On arrival at the church the procession and cortege were received by the members of the Warden Lodge of Freemasons, members of the Sutton Volunteers, Fire Brigade and police, who lined the approach to the entrance. Within the sacred building a large congregation had assembled. The Rev. H. Gee Clark (Precentor) presided at the organ, and played music appropriate to the occasion and it was while the beautiful strains of Spohr's 'Blest are the departed' and Mendelssohn's 'O for the wings of a dove' were yet dwelling in their ears that the procession, headed by the Mayor, wearing his chain of office, entered the church. Then after the many representatives of the public life of the borough had found seats, came the Rector, uttering the sublime sentences of the funeral office, followed by the surpliced choir. The coffin, which was of polished oak, was borne by the following:- Messrs. H. R. Bromwich (Postmaster of Sutton Coldfield), T. Nickols, Barnet, Bishop, E. Wood, and T. Wilson. The mourners were Mrs. Holbeche (widow), Miss Holbeche (sister), Mr. A. E. Holbeche, Mr. and Mrs. A. O. Holbeche, Mr. R. N. Holbeche, Mrs. Burrows, Mr. L.B. Burrows, Mr. E. Kendrick, Mr. John Kendrick, Mr. Arthur Kendrick, Miss Gibbs, Mr. J. L. Meakin, Mr. J. E. Pritchard, Dr. Fraser, Dr. A. H. Evans, J.P., the Rev. A. Addenbrooke, Mr. W. Addenbrooke, Mr. Mapleson, Mr. R. Fowler, Mr. Croxall, Miss Sarah Holbeche (cousin, Leamington), Messrs Cecil, Nigel and Ambrose Holbeche, the Rev. O. M. Holden, Mr. T. Ellison, Mr. C. E. P. Fox, and Mr. R. Crowther.

Among the bodies represented, with which the deceased was connected was the Warden Lodge of Freemasons, the members of which were all present with a few exceptions, these including the Worshipful Master, who was absent through ill-health. Messrs. C. E. Mathew, J.P., and A. Caddick represented the Birmingham Law Society. The Borough

Justices were represented by Messrs. J. Ansell, F. W. Brampton, J. C. Skelton, S. A. Taylor, and F. Parkes. All the Aldermen were present, and all the Councillors with the exception of Messrs. W. H. Bailey, A. R. Lynex, J. King, and Dr. Fletcher. From the two former the Mayor received letters greatly regretting inability to attend, and expressing deep sympathy, His Worship also received an apology for unavoidable absence from Mr. A. Friedlander, The Municipal Trustees outside the Council were Messrs. C. H. Brampton, G. Grove, J. Ellison and S. A. Taylor (already mentioned). The teachers of the elementary schools were represented by Messrs. J. Doherty (Town Boys' School) and A. J. Simpson (Green Lanes). There was also a contingent of the Sutton Company of Volunteers, which included Captain R. Stone, Lieutenant Yates, and Sergt. instructor King. There was a contingent of the Sutton police, and Deputy Chief Constable Hannah was also present among the public personages. It will be readily understood that several of the gentlemen mentioned attended in more than one official capacity.

Among those present either officially or as private friends were Sir J. Benjamin Stone, M.P., Messrs. J. E. Bibby (Borough Accountant), J. Ellison (Deputy Town Clerk), W. A. H. Clarry (Borough Surveyor), T. Duesbury (Resident Electrical Engineer), A. J. Knill (Borough Treasurer), A. Riley (Superintendent Highways Department), Dr. A. Bostock Hill (Medical Officer of Health), Mr. F. Merrifield (Sanitary Inspector), Mr. W. Ashford (Clerk to the Erdington District Council), Mr. R. Crowther, Mr. H. Harlond (Park Forester), Mr. R. S. Sadler, the Rev. A. E. Bedford, M.A. (Vicar of Boldmere), Mr. A. Harris (representing Lloyds Bank), Alderman E. Ansell, Colonel Graves, Mr. Nigel C. A. Neville (Stipendiary for Wolverhampton district), the Rev. F. W. Collyer, Dr. Hobbes, Mr. J. R. Jones (Aston Board of Guardians), Messrs. W. Bellamy, W. Fowler, C. F. Marston, A. H. Adcock, A. Claydon, C. H. Preston, Mrs. Eddowes and Mr. H. M. Eddowes, Mr. M. H. Highway and Miss Highway, Messrs. G. Kettlewell, W. Haynes, H. Cant, G. H. Lloyd, E. Pevton, A. Fyshe, J. Fyshe, Miss Goddard, (Little Aston), Mr. H. Jerrard (Sutton Grammar School), Colonel Wilkinson, Mr. F. Rathbone, Mr. E. Evershed.

The service was choral, and was seldom more impressive. After the thirty-ninth Psalm, sung to a beautiful minor and major chant by Felton, came the lesson from I. Corinthians, with its message of faith and hope, which was read by the Rev. T. L.

Chavasse. The part of the service within the church was then brought to a close with the hymn, 'On the resurrection morning,' and the bearers resuming their burden, followed by the mourners and the numerous congregation, wended slowly out of the sacred building, which the deceased had so often entered and which he knew and loved so well, across the churchyard. There the remainder of the office was read by the Rector. It was but a few minutes and all was over and the clergy had departed, but it was long before all the friends congregated round the grave left a spot, which will have an almost sacred interest for large numbers of Sutton people.

The floral tributes were numerous and extremely beautiful. Indeed a more lovely mass of flowers in the forms of wreaths, crosses, etc., has never before been seen on a Sutton grave. The following were among the donors:- The Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors, Lord Leigh, officials and staff at the Council House, the Sutton Coldfield Club, the Brethren of the Warden Lodge of Freemasons, Sutton Coldfield teachers, officers and men of the 1st V.B. South Staffordshire Regiment; partners of the 'Snitterfield Shoot' (Messrs. W. Hasluck, E. M. Pearson, W. H. Scott, B. W. Stevens, and H. W. Sambidge); Mrs. W. Carey Morgan, Mr. Joseph Ansell, J.P., Mr. Edward Ansell, Mr. and Mrs. E. P. Popert and Miss Hill, Colonel and Mrs. J. H. Wilkinson, Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Addenbrooke, Dr. Fraser, Mr. C. H. Barwell, Mr. J. E. Pritchard, Dr. and Mrs. Howard Chavasse, Dr. Tom Chavasse, Mrs. Chas. Chavasse and family, Miss Chavasse, coachman and wife, Mrs. Gerard Fowler, Mr. and Mrs. E. Y. Pearson, Mrs. Vincent Tongue and Miss Tongue, Mrs. E. R. T. Croxell, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Kendrick and family, Mr. and Mrs. L. J. Meakin and family, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Holbeche and daughters, Miss Holbeche, Mr. and Mrs. Burrows, Mr. G. A. Hackett, the staff of the Corporation Highways Depot, Mr. Reeves and family, Messrs. T. Ellison, C. E. P. Fox, and R. Crowther, Mr. Gibbs and family, Mr. Warren Smallwood, Mrs. Tongue (Aldridge), Mr. W. Ansell, J.P. (Wylde Green), Mr. A. L. Lloyd, Mr. T. E. Willcox, Mr. Bishop and family, Dr. and Miss Evans, Mr. and Mrs. A. Caddick, Mr. and Mrs. Vincent Jerome, Mrs. and the Misses Fowler, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Fowler, Mrs. Chavasse (Temple Row), Miss Chavasse (Wylde Green), the teachers of Sutton Coldfield, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Kendrick, Miss Kendrick (Gravelly Hill), Mr. E.

Kendrick and family, Mr. Martin, Mr. and Mrs. Pearson, Mr. and Miss Elkington, Mrs. Eddowes and Mr. H. M. Eddowes, Mr. Ellishaw and others.

The floral offering of the Corporation was one of the most beautiful among so many lovely tributes, consisting, as it did, of a harp with geraniums, arum lilies, and white laburnums. The Warden Lodge also sent a handsome cushion, made up of acacias, violets, and other flowers.

The police rendered valuable service along the whole line of the route, and at the church, and the arrangements made under the direction of Police-sergeant Jackson were of a complete and most commendable character.

In the evening a muffled peal of bells was rung from the Parish Church.

At the morning service tomorrow (Sunday) a funeral sermon will be delivered by the Rector, and it is hoped by the Mayor that as many as possible will be present. A funeral sermon will also be preached in the morning at the Maney Church by the Rev. T. L. Chavasse.

As showing how many residents were not at once made aware of Mr. Holbeche's death, I may say that the Rev. F. W. Collyer did not know of the town's sad loss when he officiated at Sutton Congregational Church on Sunday morning, and therefore no doubt, to the surprise of many, made no allusion to the event in his sermon.

At the evening service, however, Mr. Collyer referred in simple yet eloquent terms to the Town Clerk's lamented decease.

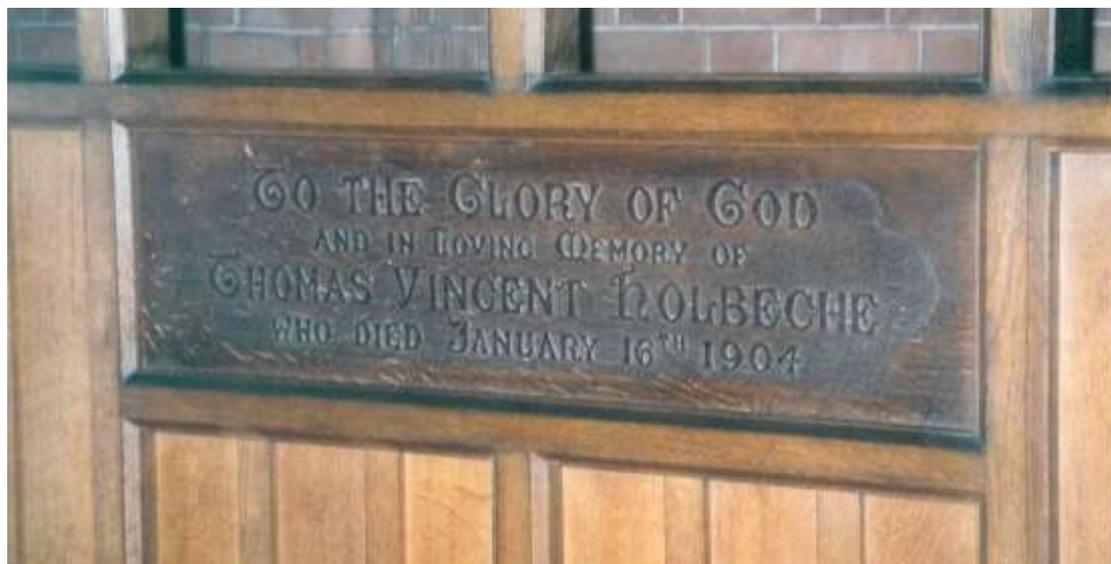
The funeral service at the Parish Church on Wednesday was exceedingly impressive, and it was one which most people will not readily forget, yet it would have been without much of its beauty and impressiveness if there had been no music.

Mr. W. Eardley was unable to be present, and his place was kindly and most capably taken by the Rev. H. Gee Clark. It is not often that a clergyman would be found able to fill such a gap, and for his services on Wednesday a debt of gratitude is undoubtedly due to Mr. Clark.

Tom's Will (now with the Holbeche Family Papers in Sutton Library) makes interesting reading. His estate was worth £24,000 and the Estate Accounts in the Family's possession reveal that he had shares in many companies and owned leasehold and freehold properties in and around Sutton.

After his death, Richard, who had missed the funeral because he was away in India, made arrangements for a Memorial to be placed in Holy Trinity Church, in honour of his brother, alongside that of their parents and grandparents.

St Peter's, Maney Parish Church also decided to honour his memory with a plaque in their Lady Chapel.



Memorial Plaque at St Peter's, Maney Parish Church

Sadly, Tom was the last male Holbeche to live in Sutton Coldfield and, with him, the family connection to the Town was destined to disappear. Edward had died at sea, Richard had moved to London, Arthur was practicing as a doctor in Malvern, Gertrude and Edith had moved to Burgess Hill and Mill was working in Loughborough.

Yet, the Holbeche name lives on in one of the roads in Falcon Lodge. I think it was Thomas Vincent Holbeche, Sutton's First Town Clerk, for whom this road was named.

And rightly so!

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Diary of Sarah Holbeche (SCRL - BCOL Q942496081 HOL)

Coleshill Street, Sutton Coldfield, 1887
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Thomas Holbeche – 2 years old?
Diary of Sarah Holbeche (SCRL - BCOL Q942496081 HOL)

Tom as a Young Man ...And a few years later
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The first Town Council and the first meeting of the Council, Sutton Coldfield, 1886
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The Council Chamber
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4th Company, 1st Volunteer Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment (The Sutton Rifle Volunteers) Tom – Front Row, 7th from the left?
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Memorial Plaque at St Peter's, Maney Parish Church
Keith Jordan's photo 2005