

John Adams — blind organist and gardener

John Adams was born 'up the Fleet valley' at Aikiehill, Girthon, on 21st September 1912. He had a twin brother Alexander. The Adams family had lived at Aikiehill from about 1903.

His parents were Robert Adams (1869 – 1952) and Margaret Jane Hughan, known as Maggie, (1876 – 1949). They married at Girthon in 1896.

The couple had 8 children, John and Alexander being the second and third youngest.

In 1919, when John was about seven years old he was accidentally shot in the face, an injury which blinded him in both eyes.

John initial education was probably with his twin brother Alexander at Girthon Public School (the parish school). After his accident John became a boarder at the Royal Blind School in Edinburgh, where the costs were paid by a benefactor from Gatehouse.



John gained admission to Edinburgh University, again funded by a Gatehouse benefactor, and graduated with a degree in music. For a few years he taught in Grangemouth before returning to Gatehouse.

Sadly Alexander, a sergeant in the K.O.S.B., was serving in India when he contracted malaria and died in 1939. He is buried in Jubbulpore Military Cemetery.

From about 1945 John lived at Barlay Cottage, just outside Gatehouse, where his parents latterly lived. After his parents died he was cared for by his younger sister, Mary Isabel Adams (Bel). Neither John nor Bel ever married.

For 33 years John travelled by bus each week to Moffat, a journey of about 60 miles each way, to play the organ in St. Andrew's Church, where he was also the choir master. He would travel to Moffat on a Thursday and come home again on a Monday, usually staying at the manse in Moffat over the weekend. He retired from this post in 1976.

As a blind musician he had to learn pieces of music by studying Braille versions and commit them to memory. He also played the cello.

John was a tall jovial man with a throaty chuckle.

The Sunday Post in 1976 reported that John 'scorned the use of a white stick' and did not use a guide dog. Instead he used his acute hearing to listen for changes in sound from his steel tipped shoes – a kind of sixth sense. In winter he hated snow lying on the ground as it muffled sounds and

made movement difficult for him.

Apart from music, John's other love was gardening. Barlay Cottage garden was full of flowers and had a very productive vegetable patch. His sister Bel helped with some of the gardening but most of the work was done by John himself, who used his senses of touch and smell to identify plants. John remembered colours from his early years so he could visualise his plants when he was told their colour.

John Adams died aged 63 on 7th August 1976 and is buried in Girthon Cemetery.



John Adams



Bel Adams