

## John Robert Phelps Goodden (1845-1929)

**Character in the Sherborne Pageant:** Sir Walter Raleigh Episode 11

**Eleventh Episode. AD 1593. Sir Walter Raleigh Comes to Sherborne**

Through the Gatehouse entrance rides Sir Walter and Lady Raleigh followed by a retinue of ladies and gentlemen - a glittering cavalcade. Sir Walter is a noble figure in his suit of rich green velvet, his ruff and plumed bonnet, and his long buff riding boots. He walks to the centre of the arena but to his wife's consternation he stumbles and falls but he grabs a handful of turf and continues " *'Tis a fair omen Sherborne holds me dear - I seize her then; and build my castle here.*"

John Goodden was born the eldest son and heir to John and Anne of Compton House in Over Compton in 1845 and was destined to one day become the Squire of the two villages of Nether and Over Compton. When he married Caroline Samuelson in 1875 and later brought his new wife to live in Compton House they were both dismayed at the poor condition of the village houses and cottages, all except one of which was owned by the estate, and so it was that John Goodden began a renovation and new building programme that employed many local men and provided new or

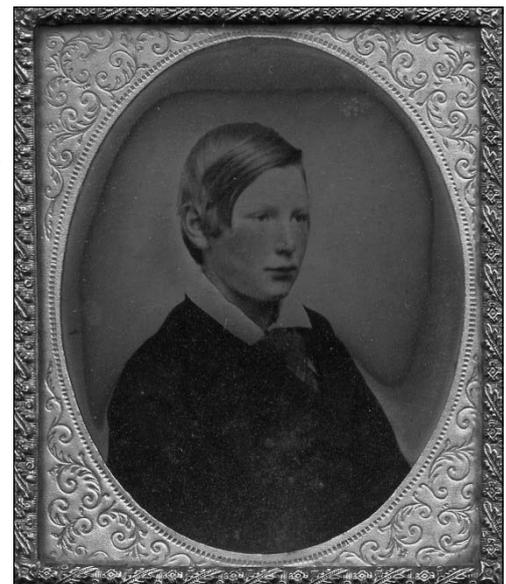


modernised homes throughout the two villages. If you visit the villages today you will see his initials 'J R P G' cut into the stonework on many of the buildings. He served for sometime in the 4th Dragoon Guards, he became chairman of Stuckey's Bank until it merged with the London and Westminster Bank when he became a director.

When John Goodden died, on 4 February 1929, there followed a service of interment at the tiny Over Compton church where members of the family, close friends, the staff at Compton House and many of the villagers attended. At the same time the same service was taking place in Sherborne Abbey where friends, colleagues, townsmen and women and representatives of the many organisations in which he had played a pivotal role were there to pay their respects. The Vicar, Canon S H Wingfield-Digby, stated that Col Goodden could have lived a life wholly given up to self-enjoyment but instead he chose to live a public life for the benefit of his fellow citizens and brother men. For 58 years he was a governor of Sherborne School serving 21 years as chairman. He was chairman of Dorset County Council and one-time High Sheriff of Dorset - commemorated in the naming, of the Arts and Crafts gatehouse he commissioned in Nether Compton, as Sheriff's Lodge. He was the founder of the Sherborne Masonic Lodge and was chairman of the Yeatman Hospital for about 50 years. He was a Justice of the Peace for over 60 years. He was also a Colonel of the Dorset Yeomanry and he founded Compton House cricket club.

A lengthy obituary was published in the Western Gazette on Friday 15 February 1929 the following tribute reprinted from *the Times* was included entitled - A friend's appreciation 'from one who knew him well'

In the death of Colonel Goodden, the county of Dorset, and his numerous friends elsewhere, mourn an English gentleman, who, while maintaining to the last the highest traditions of the old school of country squires, kept pace with all that is best in the new. As I remember him first, in the early 1880s, he was a man of rare charm; this charm never left him. Harrow, Trinity College, Oxford and some years of keen soldiering and keener sport in a famous cavalry regiment, had made of him a good cricketer, an oarsmen, a keen rider to hounds, a first class whip and a fine actor with a singularly attractive, richly modulated voice. A good classical scholar, his appreciation of literature and his early memorising of Shakespeare brought solace to his latter years when seized with partial blindness. He was tall and upright of carriage, fair haired, with noticeably blue eyes and a quick kindly smile. his ready sympathy was never withheld, no matter how busy he might be. A hospitable host, a wise and just landlord, he grudged neither time nor bodily fatigue in public service. A staunch Conservative, he was more than once invited to stand for a local constituency, and would have proved a most useful member of Parliament, but devoid of personal ambition he declined, on the grounds that he believed that he could be of greater use outside the House. He lived for others, seeking no recognition for himself. Throughout his life he set an example of efficiency, punctuality, devotion to duty and courtesy, and he will be long remembered by all who had the privilege to call him friend.



An early portrait photograph c1858 by kind permission of Michael Goodden