

Reverend John Ripsher

The Story Behind The Headstone

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In a prominent position in St Mary's Cemetery there is a fine black marble headstone featuring a cockerel. Although commemorating a man who died in 1907, it was not installed until one hundred years later, in 2007. This is unusual to say the least but is explained by a fascinating story.

Born in 1840, John Ripsher attended the parish church of All Hallows and ran a bible class for local children. In 1882 he created a football club in Tottenham to help keep boys off the streets. What could the team be called? The Tottenham area was associated with the Percy family and one of the family was known as Harry Hotspur, so John named the team Hotspur. He established a home base for the club, providing kit and equipment as well as spiritual guidance. John was also the club treasurer and became the first Club President (for 11 years). The club was soon playing other teams and was noted for its fair play and sportsmanship.

It turned professional in 1895 as Tottenham Hotspur. Due to ill health, John moved, in 1894, to Dover, to live with his sister who ran the Diamond Hotel. With failing health, he fell on hard times; blind and penniless he went into the Union Workhouse, died in 1907 and was buried in a pauper's grave, marked only with a number.

Forgotten for a century, John's grave was discovered by Peter Lupson when researching the origins of famous soccer teams for his book Thank God for Football. This led to the Tottenham Tribute Trust, which exists to help needy former players

and staff, to fund a headstone in memory of John Ripsher incorporating the Spurs emblem and motto.

The headstone was unveiled at a dedication service on 24th September 2007 attended by the Spurs Executive Director, Paul Barber, club officials and supporters. In his speech Paul Barber stated that 'John Ripsher, father and founder, was being brought back into the Spurs family after so many years away.' Dover Mayor, Bob Markham, who hosted a civic reception after the ceremony, said that 'Dover was proud to adopt John.'

Relatives of Walter Tull also attended. Walter was one of Britain's first black footballers when he played for Spurs before World War One.



Rev John Ripsher Headstone