

Famous (or perhaps not so famous) People with a Dolton Connection

You would have to go searching hard to find it, but there is a gravestone in Dolton for Thomas & Jane Owen which tells us that Jane was the daughter of John Cunningham-Saunders of Lovis-tone; the farm just across Newbridge on the left just before you reach the main road. Jane had a brother, also called John, who made a name for himself despite only living until the age of 36.

John (born 1773) attended schools at Tavistock and South Molton before being apprenticed to a surgeon John Hill at Barnstaple for five years. To complete his medical education he studied at St Thomas and Guy's Hospitals in London where he specialised in diseases of the eye and ear.



In 1804 he founded a charitable institution for the cure of diseases of the eye and ear, having been inspired to do so after seeing so many cases of "Egyptian Ophthalmia" in troops returning from the Napoleonic wars. By 1808 he and the governors of this new hospital decided to limit their work just to diseases of the eye, and the name of the hospital changed to The London Infirmary for Curing Diseases of the Eye. It subsequently became Moorfields Eye Hospital.

John Cunningham-Saunders published several specialist papers and pioneered an operation for cataracts. He was the first to find that it was possible to use belladonna (Deadly Nightshade) as a means of dilating the pupil of the eye, and yet in 1810 he died leaving a great legacy. Moorfields Eye Hospital still exists today and indeed has dozens of smaller clinics across London and even has another specialist hospital in Dubai.

Not bad for a young man from our part of the country. If you visit the church at Huish you can find a memorial there placed by Jane Owen, his sister, remembering him and his son.