

Samuel Ryder

St Albans TRAIL

An Introduction



Samuel Ryder - The Man

(1858-1936)

Although Samuel Ryder is best remembered as the founder of the Ryder Cup, he was also one of St. Albans' most notable citizens as a successful businessman, churchman and local politician.

Born in 1858 near Preston, Lancashire, he moved south coming to St. Albans in 1895. Here he set up his new seeds and mail order business and made a home for his wife, Helen Mary Barnard, whom he had married in 1890, and their three daughters, Marjorie, Kathleen and Joan. A keen gardener, Samuel realised that there was a market for selling seeds by post especially to the working classes. St. Albans then had three railway stations on different routes so was ideal for posting out the catalogues and orders for the penny packets of seeds to all over the country.

The business, begun in a shed at his first home in the city at 5 Folly Lane, prospered. So he made a succession of moves to new homes and premises in and around St. Albans until his death in 1936, aged 78.

During these years he established himself as a highly successful businessman and, with his brother James, set up the Heath and Heather herbal shops which later became part of Holland and Barrett.

All this work was only one aspect of Samuel's life. A devout nonconformist, he not only treated his employees well but made his faith an important part

of his activities becoming involved in Sunday Schools and the religious education of children.

He was also interested in local politics and civic duties and was elected as a Liberal Councillor from 1903 until 1916.

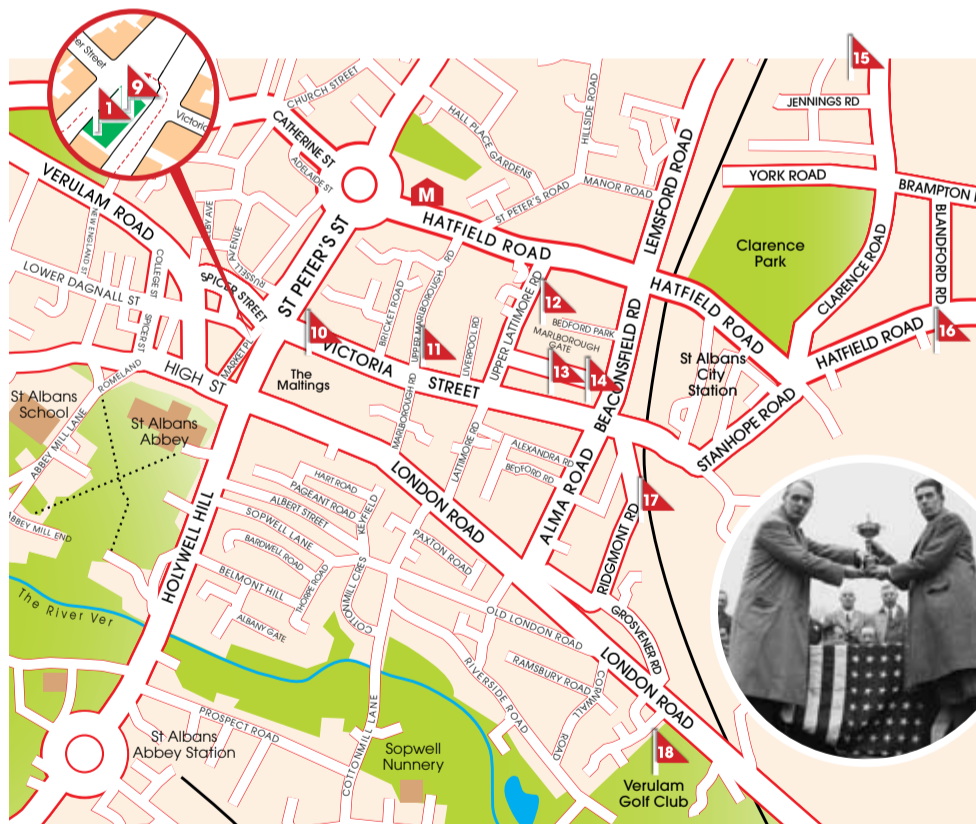
In 1905 he became Mayor, a considerable achievement for someone so recently elected and a nonconformist. It also meant performing magistrate duties. He had established himself as a St. Albans citizen of considerable note already.

Tall and slender, and never a strong man, Samuel found that such a busy life inevitably took its toll on his health. On the advice of his friend, the Revd. Frank Wheeler, he took up a sport that gave him fresh air and exercise - golf. The local Verulam Golf Club went on to acquire a notable new member.

The Ryder Cup's eventual benefactor was thus in place. The rest is indeed history.

This Trail seeks to give a short introduction to Samuel Ryder - the businessman, the churchman and the politician - also to the person that gave the world one of its greatest sporting events.

Recommended reading: "Samuel Ryder. The Man Behind the Ryder Cup" by Peter Fry.



A further '9 holes' associated with Samuel Ryder

(Allow approx 2 hours at a stroll)

- 10. Salvation Army Citadel**
Samuel contributed to the cost of the building, as he admired the Salvation Army's work amongst the poor and homeless. He also laid one of the foundation stones.
- 11. Corner of Upper Marlborough Road and 53 Victoria Street**
In 1923 the Heath & Heather business moved to this warehouse, a former hat factory.
- 12. Marlborough House (now part of Loreto College)**
Marlborough House became the Ryder family home in 1906. It was set in 5 acres of grounds and Samuel could be seen practising golf in the garden.
- 13. Faulkner House**
Here is the site of the former Faulkner Memorial Hall, used by the Sunday School of Trinity Congregational Church. Samuel helped in raising funds for the hall.
- 14. Trinity Congregational Church**
As the congregation of the Spicer Street Chapel grew, it was decided to build a larger church. Samuel contributed to the cost of the building which opened in 1903. The Ryder family then worshipped at this church. It was the minister Revd. Frank Wheeler who suggested Samuel take up golf. This is where his funeral took place.
- 15. Stortford Lodge, No 25, Clarence Road**
This became the Ryder home in 1923, after they sold Marlborough House to Loreto College.
- 16. Hatfield Road Cemetery**
Walk in the main gates and turn right at the Chapel of Rest. At the end of the path on the right is a stone memorial. Samuel was buried here in 1936. Elsewhere in the cemetery is the family grave of Charles Davis, General Manager of Ryders Seeds, his wife Marie (Samuel's sister) and their son Tom Anderson-Davis who drew up the original deed of trust for the Ryder Cup.
- 17. Heath & Heather Warehouse**
Heath and Heather moved into what was the largest warehouse in the city in 1924. A modern building stands on the site today.
- 18. Verulam Golf Club**
Samuel joined the Verulam Golf Club and was club captain 3 times. Through Heath & Heather he and James sponsored many professional golf tournaments. Then in 1926 Samuel proposed a challenge match between the USA and Great Britain & Ireland. Unfortunately the match (played at Wentworth) was deemed unofficial because the General Strike had disrupted travel and the US team had to recruit non Americans to make up the numbers. The first official match was held in 1927 - in Massachusetts USA - with a win for the Americans. The Ryder Cup was thus presented for the first time.



This Trail is jointly sponsored by:

St Albans City and District Council

www.stalban.gov.uk

St Albans Civic Society

www.stalbanscivicsociety.com

St Albans & Herts Architectural and Archaeological Society

www.stalbanshistory.org

St Albans City & District Tour Guides

www.stalbanstourguides.co.uk

Useful Information

Tourist & Information Centre -

Tel: 01727 864511

www.stalbans.gov.uk/tourism

Museum of St Albans - 01727 819340

www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk

The Ryder Cup

The Ryder Cup is a magnificent gold trophy made by Mappin & Webb, the famous London silversmiths. Commissioned and paid for by Samuel Ryder, he presented it to The Professional Golfers' Association of Great Britain to be used for an international competition between the USA and GB & Ireland. Weighing 4 pounds, the cup stands 17 inches high and measures 9 inches from handle to handle. At the top is the image of Samuel Ryder's great friend and golf professional - Abe Mitchell.



Samuel Ryder Trail

(Allow approx 45 minutes at a stroll)

1. Tourist & Information Centre

Welcome to this Samuel Ryder Trail, a short '9 hole' introduction to this famous St Albans citizen who has achieved world-wide renown by giving his name to that most prestigious golfing event and trophy – the Ryder Cup.

Leave the Tourist & Information Centre at the side of the Old Town Hall, to which we will return later, and walk across into Upper Dagnall Street. Continue down the street, crossing over at the zebra crossing into Lower Dagnall Street. Stop at The Old Meeting House between 11 and 13 Lower Dagnall Street to the right of the entrance to Bowes Lyon Mews. (Note the plaque on the building).

2. The Old Meeting House

Ryders Seeds began in the garden shed of Samuel's home, at 5 Folly Lane, from where he dispatched catalogues and orders for penny packets of seeds. The business moved several times to different premises around the City. In 1897 Samuel needed larger premises and moved from the High Street to the Old Meeting House, a former chapel which he rented as his warehouse. By 1902 the business was on the move again to a former Wesleyan Sunday School building.

Walk on, turning left into Spicer Street.

3. The Independent Sunday School

Samuel was particularly interested in the religious education of children. He was appointed superintendent of the Sunday School, supervising 18 teachers and 310 pupils. Later, as President of the Mid-Herts Sunday School Union he donated the Shield of Honour for an annual competition.

4. The Independent Chapel

Samuel was a very religious man and a nonconformist. Half way along Spicer Street on the left, is the Independent Chapel. This is where he first came to worship with his family. Samuel was an important member of the church and was elected one of the elders. The chapel grew in popularity and another church was built in Victoria Street near the City Station. (See also holes 13 & 14)

Walk on to the end of Spicer Street, turn left into George Street and cross over. This was once called Church Street offering lodgings to the many pilgrims that came to St Albans to visit the shrine. Walk up to the pedestrian crossing in front of the Clock Tower (built 1403-1412), cross over and look back at:

5. Heath & Heather shop

In 1920 Samuel and his brother James set up a herbal business. This was one of the first Heath & Heather shops. It was through Heath & Heather that Samuel first sponsored professional golf tournaments. In 1968 the brand became part of Holland & Barrett. The head office in Nuneaton recalls the Ryder name.

Cross back again to the small archway that was part of the Waxhouse Gate entrance to the Abbey. Here pilgrims would have purchased their (wax) candles.

6. Samuel's First City Centre Office

Turn and look across the High Street at the mock Tudor and gabled building, just before the traffic lights. As the business expanded and outgrew the garden shed, Samuel moved Ryders Seeds to his first city centre office where he employed just one member of staff. This was at the top right of the building, over a hatter's shop.

Walk now through the small archway. Continue down to the Cathedral and turn left into Sumpter Yard. The timber framed White Hart, an old coaching inn, is immediately opposite on Holywell Hill. To the right are two important buildings linked with Samuel Ryder's business.

7. Ryder's Head Office

(now a hotel)

In 1903 Samuel acquired a property next to the White Hart. It was replaced in 1911 with a new building designed by Percival Blow, a friend and former neighbour, and local builders, Miskins. The building is in the Arts & Crafts style. At the front are carved reliefs of sowers and reapers. The building was opened by his daughter Joan aged 7 who was driven up in a Rolls Royce and walked in through the large

front doors. She then made the first purchase of seeds for her very own garden. Such were the marketing skills of the Ryders!

The entrance led to the postal department, the General Manager's office, the sales office and the typing pool - the very nerve centre of Ryder's business. A mahogany staircase leads to Samuel's office (now the Samuel Ryder Room) where the fireplace bears the initials - SR. He was a caring employer who made sure the working environment was pleasant and, unusually for that time, he paid wages when workers were off sick.

8. The Exhibition Hall

(now a restaurant)

The success of the seed business meant that Samuel needed an Exhibition Hall which was constructed on the vacant plot between his offices and Albert Street. Again Miskins were the builders and Percival Blow the architect of this Art Deco building with carved roof and stained glass windows. It opened in 1931 and inside the visitors could see flower beds with plants grown from Ryders Seeds.

Walk up Holywell Hill to the crossroads. Cross the High Street at the lights and walk up Chequer Street, around to the front of the Old Town Hall.

9. The Old Town Hall

Built in 1831 in neoclassical style and designed by George Smith, the building served both as the Town Hall and Court House, with Mayor's Parlour, Council Chamber and Assembly Room. Samuel was elected as a Liberal councillor in 1903 and served on the council until 1916. In 1905 he became Mayor of St Albans. It was unusual for such a junior member of the council and a nonconformist to be so honoured. It shows how much he was respected. Samuel set about reorganising the Council which he thought lacked efficiency and drive. As Mayor he was also chief magistrate and would have sat here in the Court Room (open to visitors) with cells below. On one occasion he was faced by his wife in the dock who was fined 10 shillings for passive resistance, because of non payment of the Poor Rate.

Such a busy life meant that, at the age of 50, Samuel's health began to suffer. So he took up golf as relaxation, joining the Verulam Golf Club. In 1926 he suggested a golf tournament and donated a certain cup as the winning team's trophy. This was first presented to the USA at the 1927 match. The Ryder Cup – was founded right here in St Albans.

You have now returned to the Tourist & Information Centre.

We hope you have enjoyed this short introduction to Samuel Ryder. For more details regarding the Verulam Golf Club, his grave, the permanent display at the Museum of St Albans on Hatfield Road (see M on map overleaf) and programme of other guided walks, please enquire in the Tourist & Information Centre.

