

## 5. Botley Road Cemetery

Following in the wake of the cholera panic, Parliament passed the Public Health Act in 1848 and the Burials Act in 1853. By this time the Abbey churchyard had become desperately overcrowded and constituted a health hazard, no longer complying with new regulations governing depth of burial. An 1854 Act enabled boroughs to set up a Burial Board and to use the rates to establish and administer a cemetery.

A decision to cease interments within the Abbey churchyard and create an out-of-town cemetery on the Botley Road must have been taken fairly swiftly. By September 1854 a deputation was made to Lord Palmerston on behalf of a number of people who were against the closure of the Abbey churchyard. A request to the Board of Health for an extension of time before its closure had already been turned down. The deputation suggested siting the new cemetery at Priestlands, but this situation was considered to be too close to the main road.

In 1856, £2,600 was borrowed for the Burial Board and work commenced on the new Botley Road Cemetery. The London architect, Robert Lower (the son of a Romsey businessman) was commissioned to design two cemetery chapels - a gothic style Church of England chapel and an Italianate Nonconformist chapel, a reflection of the more open membership of the Council. The Nonconformist chapel, whilst no longer used for its original purpose, was restored in the 1990s by the Test Valley Archaeological Trust with the support of public subscription and is Grade II listed. It is now used as an archaeological store and workspace.

The new cemetery opened at Whitenap Hill in 1857, consisting of three acres, two of which would be consecrated. The cost, upwards of £3,000, included the two chapels, enclosure walls and a cemetery keeper's lodge house, built alongside the cemetery gates. The Burial Board records contain a rather anxious letter from a prospective keeper, hoping to live in the cottage, promising that his children would not clamber over the cemetery walls.

Administration of the new cemetery would be handled by a Joint Burials Board of Romsey Infra and Extra. The Board agreed to leave two vacant spaces by each plot for the burial of

further family members. The cemetery was consecrated by the Bishop of Winchester.

In March 1857, a child (Tom Head) became the last interment in the Abbey churchyard (although exceptions were made for interments within family vaults etc.) and Harriet Eliza Moore (aged 33 years) became the first burial within the new cemetery.

A Burial Board receipt for May 1870, payable on the interment of Joseph Olding, shows the relevant fees as:

Minister	3/-
Clerk	1/-
Sexton or Gravedigger	2/6d
For selected site	10/6d
Total	17/-

The Romsey Register for July 1857 contains an advertisement headed: "IMPORTANT FUNERAL NOTICE ..... C. Summers Furnishing Undertaker ..... in the minds of many persons there is an impression that Funerals will now be very expensive, but the Public will see that by entrusting the entire management of a Funeral to one person, it will not cost as much as it formerly did in the Churchyard."

A price list follows, detailing the cost of an Adult's Carriage Funeral with elm coffin, richly nailed and covered with black cloth and lined with flannel and to include a pillow and a fine flannel shroud. The price also included a pall, hearse and coach (with a pair of horses for each) and drivers and bearers (with hat-bands). With attendance at the cemetery, the total came to £4, 14/-. The cost of a simpler funeral would be less, a child's walking funeral being priced from 12/-. Also advertised are black clothes for men and women, including (at a price of 2/11d) the cheapest bonnets in town.

Another advertisement headed: "THE NEW CEMETERY" by Mrs. Cocks, respectfully announces that she has "provided respectable and commodious Conveyances, intended for use at Funerals at the New Cemetery. To meet the requirements of the Public, the charges on such occasions will be on the lowest possible scale."

The 1884 Stevens' Directory lists the members of the Burial Board as being:

Rev. E.L. Berthon M.A.; R. Hunt; W.E. Godfrey; R. Arnold; W.O. Purchase; E. Allan; W.B. George; A. Zillwood; G. Wheeler; G.F.W. Mortimer; W. Pinnick; F. Buckell; A. Elcombe; J.J. Osborne; R. Fryer

The Cemetery Keeper was Mr. Brown. By 1931 Harry Crabb (at Cemetery Lodge) was described as being the Superintendent, with the Clerk being Montague Chandler.

In 1902 the cemetery was extended by another four acres at a cost of £600.

The cemetery still contains iron memorial crosses produced at the Test Valley Ironworks (which was situated on The Hundred, opposite Alma Road and on the town side of the British School) at a cost which the town's poorer inhabitants could afford.

*Sources: The History of Romsey, a LTVAS Publication*  
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