

# **The Civil Cemetery, Barton upon Humber;** **A Study in Landscape History and Ecology Impact**

St. Mary's and St. Peter's churchyards and the local cemetery on Barrow Road are pleasant and interesting parts of Barton parish. Additionally the ecosystem of the latter two provide habitats for birds, small mammals, insects and wild plants- although maintenance regimes are more dedicated by notions of neatness than by habitat creation. Since the late nineteenth century interment has only been in the cemetery; a part of the parish commanding fine views over the town further down the dry valley side to the west and over the Humber Estuary across to East Yorkshire and Hull to the north.

The purpose of this essay is to;

- Construct an overview of interment through time.
- Trace the establishment and development of Barrow Road cemetery in the context of modern interment provision.
- To commend the area to local people and visitors.
- It is not the purpose of this essay to analyse biographical or historic evidence carved or displayed on monuments; nor is it intended to study the changing fashions of monuments; valuable as these studies are elsewhere.

It is almost certain that between the second and fifth centuries a series of farmsteads were strung out along the south Humber bank just above the then warpland marsh. It is likely that the household burial plots would have been the norm with random burials for slaves, infants, etc.. local Celts would have had a more centralised burial point, particularly for high status persons and this may have influenced Romano-British burial practices by the fifth century ( see Geoff Bryant, 1994 chapter 3, *The Early History Of Barton upon Humber*, W.E.A. Barton branch ). The large pre-Christian Anglo Saxon cemetery immediately east of the Old Mill ( Market Place ) excavated in campaigns between 1939 and 1990, has revealed a wealth of detail about inhumations from the sixth to eighth centuries and shows that burials had become more centralised in this developing Anglian community ( see Bryant, 1994, pp. 31-53 ).

The building of the tenth century private chapel on the site of the west tower of St. Peter's church led to, or added to, an extensive Anglian Christian cemetery. Subsequent extensions to the layout plan led to an expansion of the churchyard for throughout the Middle Ages interment was monopolised by the Christian Church and , as one of the seven sacraments, burial took place only on consecrated ground, usually in the immediate vicinity of the place of worship. Burial fees formed a substantial part of a church's income and were jealously guarded by minster churches as chapels of ease developed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Acquisition of burial rights may be perceived as the point at which a chapel becomes a parish church, although the history of St. Mary's is complex in this regard.

It is not the aim of this essay to detail medieval burial practices or to explore the nature of medieval churchyards. The east-west orientation of inhumations was standard but not universal. During the Middle Ages precise identification of particular burials was not the norm except for high status ( high-income ) burials in the floor of the church itself or in tombs incorporated into the furniture of the church. Common folk related to the site rather than to a particular point.

Long term concentration of burials in a constricted location ( in the case of St. Peter's over 900 years ) created particular problems. Bones unearthed by grave diggers were

sometimes deposited in charnel houses attached to the church—few survive, St. Mary's, BEVERLY AND St. Leonard's, Hythe, being notable exceptions. As land rose retaining walls were built needing a high level of maintenance.

Of course not everyone would have been buried in churchyards; battle, murder, fatal accidents, social exclusion or detachment from Church practices, could result in random interments. Currently interments do not have to be in civil or church cemeteries, although sites have to be approved by the local Environmental Health department.

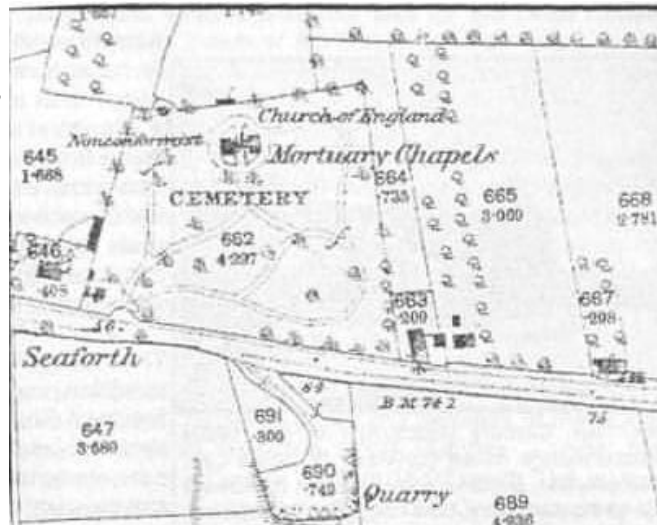
As in so many things, a solution to the problem of overcrowded churchyards was pioneered by Napoleonic social reform. Civil cemeteries began in France when in 1804 the newly elevated

Emperor forbade further churchyard interments. Private cemeteries began in Britain late in Georgian times- Liverpool Necropolis opened in 1825 and set the pace with planed ( emparked ) landscape inviting perambulation and recreation. Social reformers demanded similar provision for the poor and from the 1850 Metropolitan Interment Act onwards a series of Burial Acts gave the Board of Health powers to establish new cemeteries and to buy up private one.

Cremation was given increased social credibility when in 1874 Queen Victoria's surgeon founded the Cremation Society. In 1885 Woking Cemetery had built the first crematorium and by the 1930's Golder's Green Crematorium was servicing 25% of the nations cremations.

Like all aspects of social culture, burial evidence has been largely directed by fashion. Headstones, a post Reformation fashion, developed in artistry up to the mid nineteenth century and in the twentieth century often reflected Art Nouveau or Functional architectural styles. Use of local stone was normal until the building of a national railway network; even so diocesan regulations often forbade the use of ' foreign stone '. Civil cemeteries have always had regulations about the size, style and fabric of memorials, they accepted the Victorian preoccupation with defining personal plots and with reflecting in death one's perceived status in life, albeit in a regulated manner. In reality many burials remained recorded only on parish records or cemetery authority records.

Most civil burial grounds were created under the provisions of one or more of a series of Burial Acts passed by Parliament between 1852 and 1885. Barton was unusual in that the minutes of the Local Board of Health, created by the terms of the Public Health Act of 1848 and the Local Government Act of 1858, make

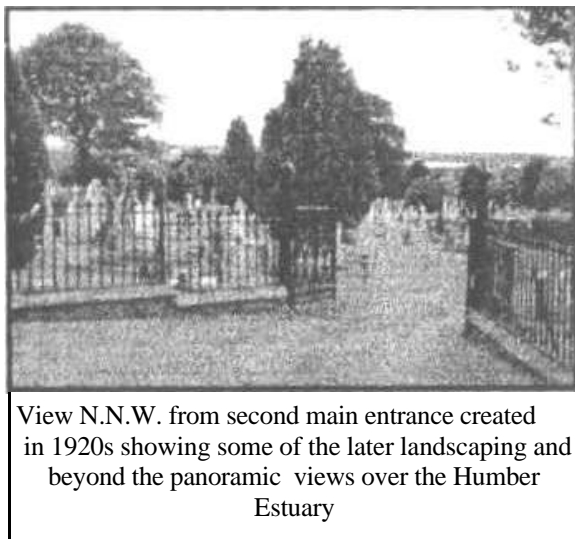


Extract from O.S. map, 25'' to the mile, showing configuration of the original cemetery and the surrounding rectangular post enclosure fields.

no mention of the cemetery in 1866/67 until its powers were taken over by the newly created Urban District Council in 1895.

In Barton the existing burial authority took the initiative when in 1867 the Burial Board for the parishes of St. Peter's and St. Mary's tendered a contract and specification for burial ground work. This was presumably by the terms of the 1855 Burial Act, section 11, which empowered churchwardens to convene a vestry meeting in parishes where no burial board had been created but where a new burial ground was felt needed. Detailed late 19<sup>th</sup> century maps show that the site chosen was a rectangular post Enclosure field north of Barrow Road and between Seaforth ( although the present house would not have stood in 1867 ) to the west and to the east a narrow rectangular plot behind a small farmstead.

In November 1866 the Burial Board gained a loan of £3,000 from the Public



Works Loan Commissioners, repayments to be £150 per half year. By early 1867 Bellamy and Hardy of Lincoln had been appointed architects and surveyors for the scheme and A. Swanson, gardener of Barton had been contracted to plough, harrow and grass seed the 4.5 acre site. He was also to plant trees, shrubs and plants as prescribed by the architects, maintain them for a year, dig out existing hedgerows and reduce the bank beside the road. An out of town site, but accessible and to the east was probably thought the most appropriate although land availability may have been an

issue. An early photograph of Barrow Road shows it to have been a sunken leafy country lane. Barrow Road remained narrow next to the original cemetery; a detailed plan survives for a road widening scheme here in 1931, to achieve this and create a new footpath a heavy wooden retaining wall had to be created to hold back Park field ( this was before the secondary modern school was built here and landscaped in the 1950's ).

The site was on gently sloping land, a 1:44 gradient leading down to the estuary warplands, therefore some embanking was needed which is still evident on the site. The main 12 feet wide drive and winding 4.5 feet wide paths were to be dug out, given a stone foundation and a ' Harwich ' gravel surface. The terrace around the chapels was to be embanked, levelled and turfed. The site was divided into rectangular blocks, some being consecrated by the Bishops of Lincoln to accommodate the then requirements of the Established Church whilst the un consecrated was often preferred by the Nonconformists. There is some evidence of disputes over the balance of allocations. Gradually burial became less denominational although a Catholic area remains. Unusually Barton cemetery has no specific area to accommodate the preferences of ethnic minorities.

As was usual in cemetery design the site was to have three buildings; a cemetery man's 'lodge' with a range of outbuildings including a 'Registrar's Office', chapels of rest and a 'dead house'. These were all constructed by Alexander Stamp, builders to a total cost of £1,865, although £764 was for

various items such as biers but mainly for the ornamental iron fence and entrance gates, which remain sturdy and impressive.



Late 19th Century photograph of the 1860s cemeteryman's house ( photo courtesy of David Lee ). It shows a lean-to conservatory, now long gone; as there is a reference to it as such this may have been the registrar's office.

The 'Lodge' also remains and in good condition, retaining most of its original features., The architects specifications were detailed and the archives survive. They catalogue; brick type, bond, mortar, constituents, size and colour of floor tiles, air bricks, yard asphalt, stone dressing for doors and windows, roofing slates, ridge tiles, skimming plaster, staircase, skirting boards, bargeboards, gutters and fallpipes.

The scullery was to have a stone sink on brick piers and draining to a modest 18 inch deep cesspool; water supply was from a well and handpump although no evidence of its location.

The Chapels of Rest remain although no longer serving their original purpose. To the west of a central steeple was the Nonconformist chapel, to the east the Established Church chapel; the building retains all its original external features, is in good condition and the 1867 date plaque is still visible. The cost of building was £790 and the specifications were detailed as with the 'Lodge'. There were two rooms in each chapel; the smaller referred to as the 'vestry'. There were clearly 'best memel' ( pine ) pews in the chapels and one reference to ' family pews '. ' Cathedral Glass ' with ' suitable lead ' was to be used in the lancet windows and the floor tiled as with the Lodge. Presumably here would be a pre interment service / meeting following the church or chapel service, there is no reference to altars.

The Dead House no longer exists but on the 1887 map it is shown in the north west corner with a path leading to it from the main drive; the man made mound on which it stood is clearly visible in the present day topography. The writer does not know when this building was demolished, of any pictures of the

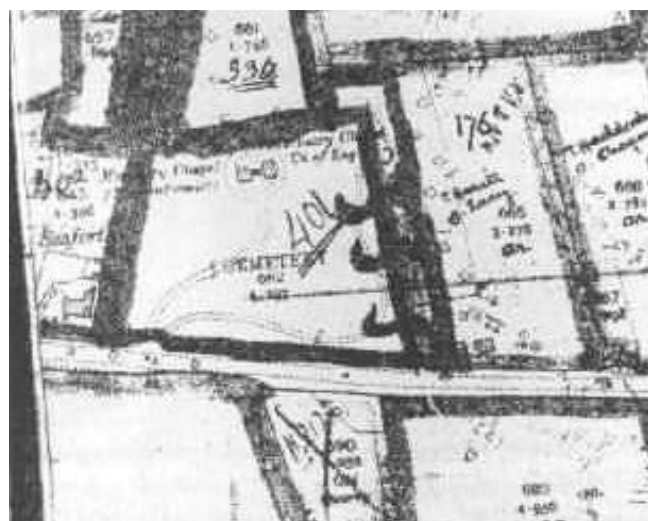


Chapels of Rest with the towers of St Mary's and St. Peter's in the distance, and showing part of the avenue of ornamental trees planted in the

building or when the chapels ceased their original function. References to ‘ridges’, ‘gables’ and specific blue roof tiles for the Dead House suggest a design similar to that of the Chapels, however the floor was to be of brick set in sand and the window glass a quarter inch ‘rough cast sheet’. Presumably here the coffins were housed for viewing prior to burial.

Of the access paths shown on the 1887 map only the main drive which led to the chapels, the drive around the chapels and the drive to the east of the chapels (later extended) remain hard surfaced, the configuration of some of the other paths is still in evidence on the ground although not the two paths leading to the Dead House. Indeed a study of headstone dates in this area and of the 1908 map suggests that this building ceased to be accessed early on; however the round building shown on the 1887 map figures on subsequent maps through to 1937.

At the first meeting of Barton upon Humber Urban District Council on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1895 the Rev. Hopkin proposed that the, “ Powers, duties, property, debts and liabilities of the Burial Board for the parishes of St. Peter and St. Mary in Barton upon Humber ... under the Burial Acts 1852—1885 shall be transferred to the Council as from 15<sup>th</sup> April next”. The motion was eventually carried on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 1895 and in April the Clerk to the U.D.C. took custody of the Deeds, Register, Book of Accounts and other documents of the Burial Board. A Burial Committee was appointed comprising the Chairman and six councillors, while the Clerk had a Registrar of Burials added to his responsibilities.



Section of O.S. MAP 25" to one mile, 1908. It appears to show that access to the Dead House has been abandoned

Two hand written minute books survive for the Burial Committee, one 1915 to 1929, the other 1929 to 1932. The surviving typed minutes of Barton UDC refer to the presentation of Burial Committee minutes, but few details are given. By the late 1920's it had become the Burial and Allotments Committee (allotments being land allocated to ex servicemen where the Caistor Road estate now stands). By 1933 it had been subsumed to the Park, Hunt Charity, Burials, Allotments and Forage Committee.

At the December 1923 meeting of the Burial Board of Barton Urban District Council it was decided that the new extension to the cemetery should begin being used from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1924. This extension is clearly field 665, 1887 O.S. map extract; a ridge is still visible where the western field boundary once was, the only brick pier in the railings fronting Barrow Road corresponds with this junction and the headstones immediately east are dated 1924 onwards. The

archives tell the story of this acquisition.

However there seems no clear archival reference to the acquisition of plots 663 and 664. Again there is a clearly visible ridge defining its boundary with the original cemetery and certain shrubs and mature trees were clearly planted here. The headstones in this area of the cemetery date from the 1910s, ( including some references to Great War casualties ), whereas headstones immediately west of this boundary date from the early 1900s ( the burial plan for the original was roughly west to east ) and prove that the 'Old Cemetery' had become full. Apparently at some undocumented point early in the century field 664 had been acquired although maybe the buildings on 663 remained. The superimpositions on the 1908 map do not clarify the issue.

Plans to further extend the cemetery may have begun before the end of the Great War but by March 1919 the Burial Committee minuted its request to a local landowner," To quit cemetery land and he be requested to sow oats and later seeds and send his bill to the council for seeds and labour". In September the Committee decided to tender for the palings fronting Barrow Road to be extended to the new eastern boundary and for a new main entrance to be constructed. The fencing and entrance gates were not erected until 1925 as a plan to site a new war memorial at the main entrance caused revisions to the design plan. As we see the new palings were a copy of those erected in the 1860s, and equally well built. The palings were extended to the cottage ( date stone 1837 ) and orchard at plot 667. There seems to have been some form of dispute with the landowner as the ' probable ' cost of the land is nor minuted until January 1921 when a local application for £1,500 from P.W.L.C. was made to the Ministry of Health ( created in 1919 ). Although ' outbuildings of the new cemetery grounds ' were pulled down in 1920 a legal judgement was required in March 1921 to get possession of the house.

The siting of the War Memorial, the acquisition of field 665 and the creation of a second cemetery entrance off Barrow Road was followed by the layout of drive and paths seen on 1932 map, and today. However the exact sequence is not clear. In June 1928 a footpath was constructed between, " The old and new cemetery", so the " tarspraying" of paths and roads in the summer of 1927 may have just been in the original cemetery. The decision in 1931 of the annual Visiting Committee that the Eastern Cemetery should not be " Beautified until laid out", fuels the uncertainty.

In September 1920, and following an application made by the U.D.C., the Ministry of Health agreed to the 'Erection of a war memorial at the principle entrance to the new



Extract from O.S. map 25" to one mile, 1932. This shows the newly extended cemetery, the location of the War Memorial.

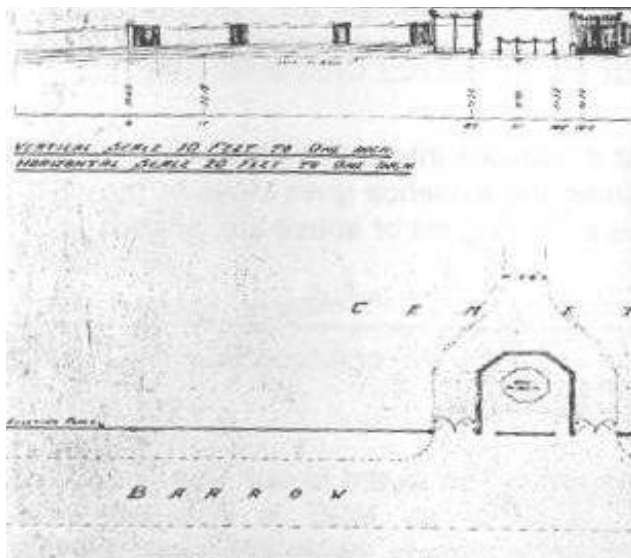
cemetery'. Plans had been made by a War Memorials Committee since December 1917 but a decision to site it at the proposed main entrance to the new cemetery was not made until July 1920 when the U.D.C. surveyor was asked to produce a detailed sketch. In fact a pattern book design was chosen, there being others of very similar design in other North Lincolnshire parishes. A photograph ( by kind permission of David Lee, Photographer, George Street, Barton ) records the unveiling ceremony; the railings not yet erected but showing the farm house and distant shelter belt of trees, which still exist.



Photo courtesy of David Lee. Apparently showing an ecumenical blessing service for Barton War Memorial. The brass band are resting their instruments. The cottage and distant trees survive.

Surprisingly as early as 1928 the minutes show that some of the lettering had to be re-cut, this was 20 years before the names from the Second World War were added. Palings and planters installed recently compliment the site.

The Victorian Burial Acts heralded a secular solution to an age old problem and led to the establishment in almost every civil parish of a landscape feature of social and environmental significance. Frequently sited on the outskirts of communities and benefiting initially from high quality planting regimes civil cemeteries became a place of resort and civic pride. Sadly over the years notions of functionalism, minimum input and economy of maintenance have come to



Plan for 'New Fencing at Cemetery, Barrow Road, Barton', ( section of ), deposited at Area Archives, Grimsby. It includes an elevation of a section of new fencing and the brick pillar where old and new fencing join.

predominate. In Many communities chapels of rest, headstones and trees and shrubs nearing the end of their life are in sad repair while the area of the site in use over recent generations seems bleak and regimented. At Barton the dereliction seen often is not far progressed although many trees and bushes are old; however the eastern end of the site lacks biodiversity. Interestingly a group of local children recently raised funds as for an Operation Lifestyle project and created a formal seating area at the eastern end of the site-with some planting. Well done.

Clearly the landscaping specifications prescribed by the

architects for the original cemetery were generous. Although the trees and shrubs are now in the last quarter of their natural lives they remain splendid and diverse, a significant arboreal asset to the parish. An analysis of the landscaping is best achieved by dividing the cemetery into three areas; **(a)** The 'Old Cemetery'-- Here large ornamental trees form an avenue alongside the main drive, a cluster behind the Cemeterymans house while three copper beech were planted along the original eastern boundary. Small ornamental trees were planted alongside the main winding path and between it and the main drive. There was also close linear planting along the northern and southern boundaries.

**(b)** The 'New Cemetery'-- Here small ornamental trees, almost exclusively of one variety, were planted in linear arrangements both east and west of the new main drive.

**(c)** The current cemetery ( previously Field 668 ) – Here no landscaping, apart from a recently planted row of small conifers, exists.

The development of Barton cemetery thus exemplifies the retreat from high status landscaping so typical of public places in the Twentieth Century. If the character of the original landscaping is to be preserved a replanting management plan is long overdue.

Along with considerable areas of cultivated and wildlife friendly gardens in the area the diverse flora of the 'Old Cemetery', and the conifers of the 'New Cemetery' encourage a diverse wild bird population. The writer has seen; swift, swallow, pied wagtail, starling, wren, robin, blackbird, fieldfare, redwing, song thrush, mistle thrush, tits, yellowhammer, chaffinch, tree sparrow, carrion crow and sparrow hawk. The relationship between landscape policy and biodiversity is clear.

An examination of this site, as elsewhere, reveals a complex interaction between physical, historical and environmental factors. To the 'explorer' the evidence gives clues to the past and informs best practice for the present and future. To neglect or abuse the landscape is to assault our environment, culture and very self.

*By Richard Clarke Vice Chairman Barton Civic Society*