

Ramsey Mortuary Chapels Heritage and Archive Centre

By Jane Yardley – Chair, Friends
of Ramsey Mortuary Chapels

As the Mortuary Chapels are now closed for the season, I thought that you might like to read a little about their history and the reason that they were built.

By the beginning of the 19th century the practice of burying the dead in churchyards had become unsustainable, due to severe overcrowding. There was also increased pressure from non-conformists, such as Methodists and Baptists, who didn't wish to be buried in consecrated ground.

If you're at all squeamish, don't read the next bit from the Peterborough Advertiser 6th September 1856.

"A revolting spectacle

On Sunday, a poor woman was buried in the churchyard at Ramsey in a grave that would appear to have been repeatedly a receptacle for human remains. Detached portions of skeletons, comprising bones of arms and legs, fragments of vertebral columns and skulls, being thrown out and exposed to view, one with hair still attached. It is surely time that another place of interment was found, where the dead might at least rest undisturbed."

A burial act was passed in 1853, enabling local authorities to establish their own public cemeteries, where all religions could be accommodated and which would eventually replace the unhealthy and overcrowded churchyards.

In 1858, the Ramsey Burial Board was formed and work was soon underway on the new burial ground in Wood Lane, where a piece of land measuring 3.21 acres was purchased from Edward Fellows Esq. for £450.00.

Robert Hutchinson, the borough surveyor, was appointed as architect to design the chapels and

lodge and by the end of November tenders had been put out for the work. Just over a week later a tender from J Ellis & Son of Peterborough was accepted and by the end of August 1859 the work had been completed.

However, the new burial grounds could not be put into use, as a further report from the Peterborough Advertiser, dated 23rd February 1860 states.

"Ramsey Cemetery

Six months have elapsed since this place was completed and a caretaker is living in the lodge, yet because the Lord Bishop of Ely is in too delicate a state of health to ride a distance of 20 miles in a carriage to consecrate that half of the land, which the church people are going to use, the dissenters cannot make use of the piece allotted to them either."

Hundreds of burials are still taking place in a graveyard that has been filled over and over again and ought, years ago to have been closed.

If the Lord Bishop of Ely is too ill to attend, could not one of his brother Bishops do the work for him?

However, 4 months later we read in the Peterborough Advertiser of 9th June 1860.

"At Last! The three fifths of the burial ground in Ramsey, that was to be used by the church people was at last consecrated by the Right Reverend Thomas Turton, the Lord Bishop of Ely, on Saturday 2nd June 1863. The remaining two fifths of the ground to be used by dissenters."

Interestingly enough the first burial in the new cemetery was that of a dissenter, Hannah Richards, aged 20 years, who was buried on 20th April 1860 before the consecration, but she has no headstone. The first burial with a headstone belongs to Mary Newton, also a dissenter, who was buried on 3rd May 1860 and her headstone is inscribed with the words, "The first stone to be erected in this cemetery."

Thank you, on behalf of us all for your continued support for our project.