

## Compton Cemetery – Background to the Cemetery Records

As David Herbert and I work our way through the paper records and what is physically on the ground, I thought it would be helpful if I wrote down the background to what is in place now, in order to put the project into context.

When I first took on the job of Clerk in 2011, I Inherited the cemetery map drawn by Chris Harvey (the last caretaker, who resigned just before I joined), 5 ledgers (one of which is a small record of war graves), 2 notebooks filled with grave numbers, 3 burial grant books and a substantial amount of loose paper, comprising burial requests from undertakers, grave requests from residents, memorial applications, and various correspondence.

I also inherited a spreadsheet, devised I believe by Fiona, which had started the job of recording all the information in the ledgers and notebooks. (David Haskins also started a visual map of the cemetery and some of the graves, although this was lost when he died.)

In 2012 I took all the information from the ledgers, notebooks, etc, and put it into the existing spreadsheet, with the aim of collating all the known information about those in the cemetery. All the paperwork is in 7 foolscap lever arch files, in alphabetical order.

I have mostly been able to find graves when they are needed for a second interment or a memorial, although sometimes not exactly where they were shown on the map, which is inaccurate in many instances.

I was, however, always aware of anomalies, notably graves in a completely different place than that marked, or graves where no graves were marked. It was difficult to know how to address this, and in most cases the graves were old ones, so not an immediate issue.

The following are examples of issues in recent years:

- An existing interment in a grave that was owned by another person. By investigation we have now found that this grave was re-allocated to someone who wanted to be near relatives, but this was not recorded or the original owner advised. In this case, the gravedigger was digging the grave for the burial when they came to the existing coffin, and another grave had to be hastily found for a burial that same day.
- An ashes plaque under a bench by the cloisters that was not marked on the map or in the spreadsheet. The family knew it was there, and told me when they wanted to inter a second set of ashes next to it.
- Having to allocate a new plot to a family in time for an interment, where the plot they had purchased had been given to another family and not recorded.
- People being recorded as buried in two different sections - particularly the case, so far, in F and G, where names are recorded twice.
- Very haphazard numbering, with no sequencing or logic, together with numbers missing or repeated.
- Ashes exhumed and not recorded
- A couple recorded in being 2 separate graves, when the records show they should be together.
- 4 different spellings of a name in the records, the correct spelling ascertained through *Ancestry.com*.
- Ashes buried in an existing grave, with family, but not recorded.

What this project is achieving is of enormous value, not just in terms of accuracy of the records, but also an amazing resource of information about those buried in the cemetery.

We are working on each section individually, so that the following is achieved:

- An accurate measurement of each section, and of the cemetery in its entirety
- A record of each grave. Those that have tombstones have been photographed, and it will be possible to access the photograph and details of who is in the grave by clicking on the grave number in the map. Or by searching for a name. The research we are doing also highlights the listed graves, and those that contain people of importance, both locally and nationally.
- Accurate details of who is in each grave. The current spreadsheet does not always record subsequent burials in a grave, particularly when they are ashes.
- Clear details of which plots are empty and useable. The old map showed all sections of the cemetery as being useable, which is not the case because of the trees, but there are a number of plots in the older section of the cemetery which are available, and this wasn't clear before.

Near to the Cloister we have found an area which – according to the records and we have no reason to believe otherwise – contains the bodies of 8 stillborn babies. It is behind existing graves and is now a wildlife garden, but with no evidence of the burials, and is in danger of being forgotten. We would like to recommend that a plaque is erected at this spot to commemorate the babies. A simple terracotta plaque on a post, with their last names (none of them had been given first names) would be appropriate.