

Watts Cemetery – cemetery records digitalisation

As you will have gathered from David Herbert's reports, he and I have made numerous visits to the cemetery over the last few months, and considerable time has been spent, by us both, in tracking down, rationalising and authenticating the records of the people interred in the cemetery.

We have, as you have been made aware, consistently had to deal with anomalies in the layout of the map and the information recorded in the spreadsheet. We have frequently found that a body recorded as being buried in one grave is, in fact, in a different grave. Only this week we have found that the map shows graves in H as being in a different position to where they are actually located.

I have been grateful for the help of Fiona, Martin Foran, Phil Gorton and Jane Turner, all of I have turned to when we have been stumped by lack of information. The most recent and concerning of those has been the complete disappearance of graves numbered L26 and L27. As David Herbert mentions in his report, these are recorded in all the ledgers and old books as being present, and both have bodies in them, with full enough details of names, ages, dates of death and dates of interment to make their reality a fact, but there are no such graves and no room for them in that area. They must have been there, as Mrs Marks was buried 10 years after her husband, so the graves were clearly in existence for some time and then, somehow, the record of them was removed from the map.

Unmarked graves, as these must have been, have been a source of some concern to us. Where there is a gravestone there is helpful evidence of the incumbent of the grave, often at odds with what is recorded, but without a gravestone there is no means of corroboration. Again, I emphasize that the two graves mentioned must have been unmarked, but there is no room for them where they should be, or even in the vicinity.

At the end of this report I have included a sample of the email correspondence between myself and David Herbert, which illustrates the complexity of the problem.

Having said all this, we are both thoroughly enjoying the project, which is enormously satisfying when a discovery is made or facts match up, and I know that David is spending many more hours on the project than he is billing for. It will be quite a work of art when it is finished and will provide the Parish Council with both a completely accurate and factual record of who is in the cemetery and where, but also the opportunity to identify many more useable graves and ashes plots than we thought.

I have a number of recommendations to make (mentioned in David's reports):

Path from Zone to the remainder of the cemetery: at the moment, people are walking through the gap in the hedge and straight up the cemetery towards the chapel, walking over graves as they do so. If a path was made from the gap in the hedge, around the ashes scattering area, and to the path at the edge of the cemetery, by the fence, this would both delineate the ashes scattering area and stop graves being walked on.

Babies graves: by the Cloisters there is an area, behind some graves, where the bodies of 8 still born babies are buried. Chris has made this into an attractive area, as he has with so much of the cemetery, but there is no evidence that 8 babies are buried here, and it would be nice if there could be a memorial plaque, a simple recording of their names.

Flower bed by the lych gate: on the right, just beyond the first path which runs parallel to the road, is a flower bed area. This actually covers 8 graves, and I wonder if it would be more fitting if the area of the 8 graves is returned to grass.

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At the end of Section B in the spreadsheet is Kathleen Elsie Judge - the only data provided is that she apparently owned Grant Number 17

I have discovered the only Kathleen Elsie Judge on the planet was born in 1899 and died in 1973. Also that she was buried in Send Cemetery, not Compton. However.....

Grant 17 is for Plot B.150 and was bought in 1951 by Frederick William Wells for his father William Frederick Wells - who was indeed put into Plot B.150 in that year.

I can find no familial link between Wells and Kathleen Judge. However, Kathleen's maiden name was Beaumont and guess who is right next door to William Wells in Plot B.152? Alice Beaumont - Kathleen's Mum!!

What are the chances that when Kathleen died (1973), she was due to be put into B.150 alongside her Mum (in B.152) - but then the realisation that Mr Wells was already there?

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James and Eliza Mercer are I think Elizabeth's Grandparents - James is in B61 (d.1901) and wife Eliza is B91 (d.1923) - they are only about 3 plots apart.

Elizabeth's parents are George James Mercer and Eliza Emma Mercer - I was fairly convinced that they're both in B124. However....Elizabeth is as you say, said to be in L16 - which has a 1972 headstone purely for little Debbie. I suppose 18 years later Grandma's ashes could have been added and simply left unmarked.

Nevertheless, my notes from our recent visit seem to indicate that in B124 there are 2 Mercers (perhaps Elizabeth's parents), 2 Rainbirds (perhaps Frank and Elizabeth) and an extra Rainbird (probably the stillborn Mark). I also agree with your assessment that Frank wouldn't have been with his in-laws and not his wife.

But then, Elizabeth did die 2 years before Frank (she 1990, him 1992). But her parents died in 1936 and 1937 - surely Elizabeth would have joined them rather than a granddaughter - but maybe not..... hopefully another close look at the B124 headstone will be helpful.

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I seem to have lost two plots:

L26 - A. and J. Marks

L27 - A. Smith

Both are included in the Red Book and the Brown Book and also have entries in Ledger Book B

My Chris Harvey map makes no mention of those plot numbers

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I attach a picture of part of Section M - you will see that M.018 is indicated as Empty (which it is) - it was never part of Chris's map, in fact neither was M.021 (which does in fact contain Winifred Williams). I think it was squeezed in because JR Williams had been allocated M.022

However, M.022 was eventually given to Sheelagh Harring (perhaps by mistake) and JR Williams was given M.016 instead - which is next to Charles Williams (in M.015).

Winifred and Charles have been interred fairly luxuriously by the gravedigger (given there is supposed to be a line of plots between them), the upshot being that M.018 is not big enough now to offer as a grave (my diagram is NOT to scale). Consequently, I made a note on the map that it could be used instead for someone's ashes.

However, on reflection, it seems clear that the Williams family have engineered to be together and would not appreciate Winifred and Charles being unexpectedly split up by someone else's ashes.

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Regarding the interment of Rowland Alston (the Watts Gallery Curator) and the two stillborns (Harmsworth and Stevens) indicated at the left end of the Cloister near Sturgis:

*The Register of Burials Ledger (Book 'A'), says the two babies were put separately into Plot **F57** in 1913 and 1915 respectively. The Ledger subsequently states that Rowland Alston was interred in January 1959 - into Plot **G57a**.*

*Importantly, why on earth does section G start with number 57? Last year, we thought it might be because extra plots were added and their numbering conflicted, so the section was split into F and G. However, the Ledger does contain reference to **G70** (Watts) and **F56** (Sturgis) from 1904 – so there was definitely both sections F and G in existence (and numbered as per Chris Harvey's map) before the babies were interred. So... where is F57? Can it really be the same physical location as **G57a** (as indicated on Chris's map)? I'm not convinced anymore.*

I also cannot find any particular link between Alston and the two babies (he would only have been a teenager at the times of their still birth) and when he died (unmarried), his estate seems to have been left to a spinster sister.

What's your view on this? Might the coincidence of F57 and G57 have caused an erroneous assumption that they're one and the same thing?

*On a separate point, the Burial Grant Book has a deed showing that in March 1959, Plot **G57a** was actually sold to Mr R Ives (2 months after Alston was put in there). The spreadsheet doesn't have R Ives in it. Do you have anything for R Ives? Maybe he simply stumped up the cash on Alston's behalf?*