

Makers of the Old Cemetery

The way the Old Cemetery came into existence is pretty well known - full churchyards and thus the urgent need for a burial ground for the whole Borough, the original plan by John Claudius Loudon, the passing of an Act of Parliament in 1843 that allowed for the conversion of a part of Southampton Common into a cemetery, the final layout according to a new design by William Rogers - all these points have been covered in the past. What is not so well known is the story of what was involved in the actual construction of the original cemetery, who did the work, and the sequence of events leading to the opening of the new cemetery in 1846.

The first Minutes Book of the Borough of Southampton Cemetery Committee starts with a meeting of the full council on Thursday 6th July 1843. This meeting heard the Town Clerk report that the Bill permitting the creation of a Cemetery on 15 acres of Southampton Common had been passed by the House of Lords and received Royal Assent. It was therefore resolved that a Cemetery Committee be set up, with 15 members consisting of the Mayor, Mr Coles, Mr Brooks, Mr Ball, Mr Lankester, Dr Oke, Mr Mabson, Mr Coxwell, Mr Davies, Capt Breton, Mr Eckless, Mr Beavis, Mr Cooper, Mr Abraham, and Col Henderson. Only three of these were needed to form a quorum!

At the first meeting of the new committee on **31st August 1843**, John Loudon's report on his proposed design for the cemetery was received, and included in full in the minutes.

Although it was not explicitly stated, it was clear that responsibility for co-ordinating all aspects of the work was to be taken by the Borough Surveyor, John Doswell. In September the council advertised for tenders for the walls and the drainage, on the assumption that the Loudon plan would be accepted.

However, Loudon had been very ill when he submitted his plan, and actually died in December 1843. The council took the opportunity to advertise for alternative plans for the layout of the new cemetery. Two new plans arrived, from Mr Page and Mr Rogers, and at the 21st February 1844 meeting that of William H Rogers was chosen over those of Loudon and Page. Loudon had already been paid a fee for his design, and later Mr Page was given £5 compensation for his effort. Directories show entries for William Rogers and son, nurserymen, florists and landscape gardeners, 181 High Street and at Red Lodge, London Road.

Regardless of the change of layout, the area had to be adequately drained, and this was done according to Loudon's original plan. The drainage work contract to was awarded to Arthur Few and William Capon, 27 April 1844.

The next step was to ask for tenders for building the boundary walls, and the contract was given to local builder Arthur Few on 27th February 1844.

In a similar way, a contract for making roads and paths was awarded to Arthur Few and William Capon, on 13th March 1844

The prestigious job of designing and building the chapels and lodge was the subject of an advertisement agreed in March, the cost of the buildings not to exceed £2000. As a

result 25 tenders were received by 4 June 1844. The winning bid, chosen on June ?, was by young architect Frederick John Francis, who had a London practice with his brother Horace. An interesting aside is that in the correspondence of Charles Dickens, when an applicant for his help was demonstrating his bona fides, he claimed that he had been apprenticed to Messrs Francis, architects of Bruton Street! Although he designed other churches and chapels, Frederick Francis' best known design was for Brompton Hospital, the first purpose built hospital in the country.

It is interesting to note in the light of current problems with council vehicles sometimes being driven over graves, that on 6 July 1844, it was requested that fir poles be set along the carriageway to keep carriages on the path.

The next step was to get someone to actually build the chapels, and this also went out to tender. On August 3rd 1844 the contract was given to John Foot, for completion in 6 months. Contemporary directories show John Foot, builder and contractor of 18 Orchard Lane. Two men stood surety for John Foot, namely Thomas Purchase, brewer and James Brown, stonemason.

On August 8th the sites were staked out by the three men principally involved, namely John Doswell the borough surveyor, Frederick Francis the architect and John Foot the builder.

Meanwhile, thought was being given to the entrance gates and railings, and on Sept. 5th an advertisement was approved asking for tenders for the these items. On 1 Oct. 1844, the tender from Barwell & Co. of Northampton was accepted, and the contract was signed on 7 Dec. 1844 with Mr Edward Harrison Barwell for making and fixing iron railings. Mr Francis was asked for a design for the entrance gate, and on 19 Dec. 1844, he presented his design together with Mr Barwell's estimate for £57.

The buildings, originally required to be finished in 5 months - later extended to six - were finally completed in August 1845, but due to ongoing negotiations with the Bishop of Winchester, the cemetery was not consecrated until 7th May 1846.

Dave Jacobs, Oct. 2008