

A Guide to Tower Hill Cemetery



This cemetery was extended into this area after extensions in 1890 and 1936

Look out for the dog waiting for its master



The Wishing Tree

The tree, it is claimed, can grant wishes and in times gone by the custom was for children to embrace the trunk and make a wish when they were in trouble or really needed something.

The un-consecrated chapel or 'The Chapel for the performance of the Burial Service by persons not being a member of the United Church of England and Ireland' was built by James Long along with the boundary walls, entrance piers, and pillar gates.

There are 6 First World War Commonwealth War Graves in the cemetery for: Pte Harry Churchill, Pte James Cox, 2nd Lt Charles M Doolittle, Cadet S J Miles, Pte A Townsend and 2nd Lt Bryan F Lawson

There are 5 2nd World War Commonwealth Graves

One of the most interesting memorials in the cemetery is that of the Roberts family of Caswell Farm, Curbridge which is of a full church with spire.

The hole in the hedge—no-one knows why this is here, quirk of fate or planned planting.



Most of the Victorians who built modern Witney are buried in the lower section of the cemetery. The oldest recorded person to be buried was a Robert Taylor in 1904 who was listed as 98. The names of Early, Marriott, Collier appear frequently, many of whom roads and landmarks are named after today.

The consecrated chapel was built by Malachi Bartlett along with the Porter's Lodge, the dividing fence between the 2 areas and the paths from the entrance to the chapels. The Lodge was originally supposed to have a committee room but this was removed from the plans in December 1856



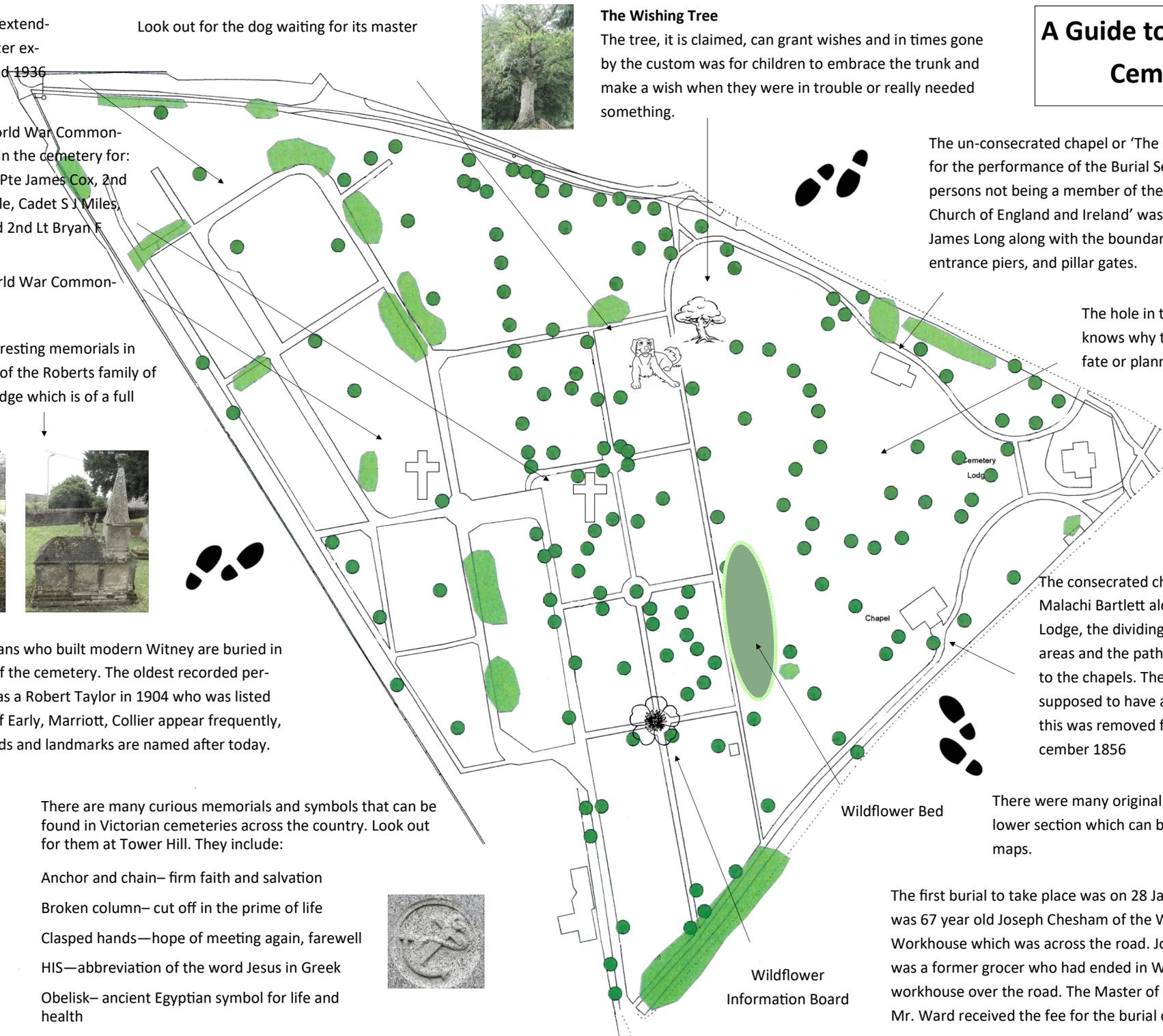
There are many curious memorials and symbols that can be found in Victorian cemeteries across the country. Look out for them at Tower Hill. They include:

- Anchor and chain— firm faith and salvation
- Broken column— cut off in the prime of life
- Clasped hands—hope of meeting again, farewell
- HIS—abbreviation of the word Jesus in Greek
- Obelisk— ancient Egyptian symbol for life and health



There were many original circular paths in the lower section which can be seen on earlier maps.

The first burial to take place was on 28 January 1857 and was 67 year old Joseph Chesham of the Witney Union Workhouse which was across the road. Joseph Chesham was a former grocer who had ended in Witney Union workhouse over the road. The Master of the Workhouse Mr. Ward received the fee for the burial of 6s.





A Brief history of Tower Hill Cemetery



After the Secretary of State had decided that the existing St Mary's Churchyard should be closed for burials following new Acts of Parliament in 1849, a new burial ground was needed in Witney.

A Witney Burial Board was formed from a Vestry meeting of the Witney Parish on Thursday 2nd August 1855. The 9 members elected to the Board were; Rev R Sankey, Rev Mr. Mayer and Messrs. J W Clinch, J Francis, W Dutton Sen, J Clinch Jun, S Lea, H C Townsend and S Shuffrey. The Clerk was James Westell.

The Board considered areas for the new Burial Ground and settled on a piece of green and pasture land 3a 1r 25p on 'Galley Hill' in the Tything of Curbridge, in Witney Parish. It was purchased for £170 by an agreement dated 20th March 1856 between the Board and Charles Richard, Bishop of Winchester and George Spencer Churchill, Duke of Marlborough. £51 went to the Bishop and £119 6s to the Duke.

The architect employed by the Board was the Local Surveyor William Wilkinson who was also responsible for designing Holy Trinity Church, Witney Police Station, Hailey Church and other buildings in and around Witney, but is widely known now for his masterpiece which was the Randolph Hotel in Oxford. Wilkinson oversaw the work of two local builders, James Long Jun and Malachi Bartlett who completed the works. The specifications for the work are held by the Town Council and stated that stones should be from Taynton, Windrush or Milton quarries or Bath stone and the roofs should be of Stonesfield Slate. All of this of course should be carried out in a 'workmanlike manner'. The cost of erecting the chapels and Cemetery Keeper's Lodge and laying out the grounds was £1360.

The first burial took place in January 1857 and the Church Vestry (via the Burial Board) continued to manage and maintain the cemetery until it was incorporated into the new Urban District Council in 1894. Extensions were made to the cemetery in 1890 and 1936.

The Town Council became responsible for the cemetery in the Local Government reorganization of 1974 and it continues to manage and maintain the site. Burial registers before 1940 are held at the Oxfordshire Register Office in Oxford.



TOWER HILL CEMETERY



Tower Hill Cemetery was opened for burials on 1st January 1857 and was originally named the Witney Burial Ground. The name Tower Hill did not come into being until after the Witney Water Tower was built at the top of 'Razor Hill' in 1903 (it subsequently burst in 1904).

Anyone who had ancestors living in Witney from 1857 onward more than likely has some buried within the Cemetery....

Do you care about our cemeteries?

Do you have ideas about how to honour

our loved ones and keep their memorials tidy?

Contact Cllr. Duncan Enright at info@witney-tc.gov.uk

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