

## Cemeteries of Widcombe – Bath Heritage Open Days Sunday September 10th

### Magdalen Chapel

The origins of the Chapel are obscure and have been the subject of much conjecture. The earliest hard facts are that sometime between 1090 and 1100 a deed of gift was made by Walter Hosat, granting the Chapel of “the Blessed Mary Magdalene at Holeweye” to the Abbey Church of St Peter, Bath; and that around the end of the twelfth century a small hospital for lepers was founded close to the Chapel consigned to the care of the Abbey’s monks.

The Chapel came under the remit of Bath Municipal Charities, and hence St John’s Hospital, in 1894 and has remained so ever since.

The Chapel’s ancient graveyard affords a wonderful view of Bath Abbey, while the delightful Magdalen Chapel Garden, created in 2008 as a memorial garden dedicated to a lifelong member of the congregation, offers a sanctuary of peace and quiet on the walk up from the city.

**DIRECTIONS:** walk up from the bottom of Wellsway. The Magdalen Chapel is situated on the right on the corner of Magdalen Road and Holloway. *Open 11.30-2.30.*



### Southcot Cemetery (Old Baptist Burial Ground) Lyncombe Hill

This small but rather beautiful burial ground reminds us of the great contribution made by the Baptist community to the life of Bath particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

As the number of Baptists in Bath grew during the eighteenth century there was an increasing need for their own burial ground especially as the alternatives were either a burial according to the rites of the Church of England or one in unconsecrated ground.



It seems that the Lyncombe Hill Burial Ground was purchased from the “South Cot House Estate” around 1810 through a generous bequest from a certain Opie Smith who was a deacon in the church. The burial ground was officially closed in 1887 but there is evidence that the last actual burial took place around 1900. Most of the graves are unmarked but

records show that between 1807 and 1853 324 children were buried there (of whom 204 were under the age of 2). A very sad reminder of the horrendous child mortality rates in nineteenth century England.

The burial ground was originally accessed from Lyncombe Hill via a Gothic style archway above which was two room accommodation for a sexton (although the whole area was only 25 feet long and 12 feet wide). By 1963 this had fallen into disrepair and was finally demolished in 1970.

One of the most well known Baptists who was interred in the burial ground was George Cox a “master hatter” from Stall Street. Cox fought against poverty (and strong drink!) and campaigned for both political reform and the abolition of the Corn Laws. He died on 1 January 1861 and his funeral procession was witnessed by thousands of people who lined the route from Stall Street to the burial ground.

The burial ground was saved from development by the Bath Preservation Trust by whose kind permission we visit it today.

**DIRECTIONS:** turn left up Lyncombe Hill from Claverton Street, the burial ground is accessed between two houses near the bottom of the hill on the left. Open 11.00-3.00pm.

## Bath Abbey Cemetery, Perrymead



The cemetery was designed by the well known gardener and horticulturalist John Claudius Loudon and was opened in 1843. According to Pevsner (in his Buildings of England series) it was “laid out according to his scientific and hygienic design and management principles”.

There are a number of very interesting people buried in the cemetery; see if you can find these tombs, graves and memorials:

**George Augustus Robinson** – his tombstone describes him as “Chief Protector of the Aborigines of Australia and Pacificator of the Tasmanian Aborigines”. In fact he was an appalling man who tricked the entire native Tasmanian population into living on a remote island where he appointed himself “governor” and where the majority of them quickly died. He became rich, married a second wife 40 years his junior and bought a house on Widcombe Hill.

**The Right Reverend Thomas Carr** – the first Bishop of Bombay and later Rector of Bath Abbey. His daughter Lady Hobart-Hampden is also buried in the family tomb as is her Ladyship’s maidservant of 30 years, Jessie Northcutt.

**The Partis Monument** – Anne Partis provided an endowment of £68,000 (a huge sum in 1825) to found a college for 30 “gentlewomen” in Weston, Bath. Partis College exists to this day.

**Rear Admiral John Bythesea** – a man whose surname rather determined his career! The youngest son of the Rector of Freshford who joined the Royal Navy and won one of the very first Victoria Crosses for an heroic piece of espionage against the Russians during the Crimean War.

**Arnold Ridley** – a Bath man who served bravely in the First World War and found fame later in life as Private Godfrey in Dads' Army.

The mortuary chapel (1844) was designed by George Phillips Manners (the Bath City Architect from 1823 to 1862) in an unusual Neo-Norman style (it was originally intended to have two "cloister wings"). The Abbey have informed us that it is currently unsafe and therefore we are unable to access the interior.

**DIRECTIONS:** Go up Ralph Allen Drive from the centre of Widcombe passing Perrymead on the right-hand side, the gates to the cemetery are just a few yards further up the hill (just beyond the bus stop). (If you walk up through to the top gate you are well positioned to visit the RC cemetery and Eyre Chapel next door)

## Eyre Chapel, Perrymead Roman Catholic Cemetery

The Eyre Chapel is a very good example of nineteenth century Catholic Gothic Revival architecture described by the eminent architectural historian Pevsner as "[s]mall but elaborate in Geometric Frenchified Gothic, with polygonal [East] end, unbroken ridge line, polygonal tower and spire".

Above the porch is the Eyre family motto *Neminem metue Innocens* ("fear no-one if you are



innocent"). The architect was Charles Francis Hansom who is less well known than his older brother, inventor of the eponymous cab. The interior of the chapel is equally impressive with columns of Devonshire marble, a hammered ironwork screen by Hardman and stained glass windows by Hardman Powell. The altar canopy is supported on Irish marble columns and the floor is paved with Minton tiles.

The Eyres were a very old Derbyshire family who resisted conversion to Protestantism after the Reformation (that is they were "recusants"). John Lewis Eyre was a founding director of the South Western Railway Company and a man of great piety who was made a Count of the Lateran Hall and Apostolic Palace by Pope Gregory XVI in 1843. Of his 5 sons 4 became priests one of whom was Catholic Archbishop of Glasgow.

Major William Eyre who gave 40 years of service to England's oldest Catholic charity is also buried in the crypt. His daughter Belinda Carruthers is now trustee of the charitable trust which looks after the chapel. We are very grateful to Belinda and the trust for allowing us access to this beautiful family chapel today.

**DIRECTIONS:** coming from the centre of Widcombe turn right up Perrymead from Ralph Allen Drive (this is quite steep!) then take the first left up Pope's Walk until you reach the gates of the Catholic Cemetery on the left hand side. Pope's walk can also be accessed via a path from the Abbey Cemetery (see above). *Open 11.00-4.00pm.*

## St Thomas a Becket Church

The beautiful parish Church of Widcombe built by Prior Cantlow 1490-8 on the site of an earlier Norman Church and therefore older than the Abbey.



The Church is in the Gothic Perpendicular style although like many other English Churches it was heavily “restored” by the Victorians. Note the Royal Arms (circa 1660) over the Chancel arch and the Victorian stained glass which is unusual in that it features shrubs, plants and flowers but no human figures. Also look out for the Anglo Saxon stone cross head at the back of the Church, it may be a “Gregory Cross” which Pope Gregory ordered to be erected near former pagan temples to “purify” the site.

Finally do wander through the small but lovely graveyard that winds around three sides of the Church. There are some particularly interesting views of Widcombe from the back of the Church.

**The Church will be open for tea, coffee and lovely cakes from 3.00 to 5.00pm thanks to the extremely kind Churchwardens and parishioners. An ideal way to finish your walk!**

**DIRECTIONS:** The Church can be reached from either end of (unsurprisingly) Church Street but perhaps the Ralph Allen Drive end would make more sense if you have just visited the Eyre Chapel and the Abbey Cemetery. Please note that Church Street is currently blocked to vehicular through traffic.