



SEPULTURE AND THE CITY: The Social  
Role of Burial and  
Interment Spaces in Early 19th Century  
Britain and Their Impact on  
the Leeds General  
Cemetery Company  
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## **Abbreviations**

LGC: Leeds General Cemetery

## Introduction

Throughout the nineteenth century, there were a number of changes in the methods and values surrounding the interment of bodies, as the provision for the burial of corpses shifted from a churchyard system to one of general, garden cemeteries. Within this essay, I will examine some of the factors which contributed to this change. I will then examine how these impacted on of the Leeds General Cemetery, which first opened for burials in 1833. In particular, I will examine the motivations of the committee responsible for funding, designing and maintaining the Leeds General Cemetery.

Section one will focus on the shifts in attitudes towards public health that occurred in Britain between 1800 and 1850, which in turn affected public opinion on the role and design of burial grounds. Three key issues will be explored within this section: the changing status of the body, public health legislation, and the way in which these factors impacted upon the working class. The role of the working class is particularly central to the nineteenth century graveyard: many of changes in the status of the corpses were connected to the massive urban population growth, which was predominately due to working class movement to large cities for factory work during the Industrial Revolution.<sup>1</sup> I will explore some of the motivations of Edwin Chadwick and G.A. Walker in their reporting and reform of legislation surrounding burial. What changes occurred in attitudes and practicalities surrounding burial? Why did the nineteenth century see so much change?

In section two, I will give an account of the formation and running of the Leeds General Cemetery over the first half of the nineteenth century. Through this, I will explore the motivations the committee and shareholders of the Leeds General Cemetery company in creating a new cemetery. What did the committee hope to achieve with the Leeds General Cemetery? What needs were they meeting that were being neglected in the other burial sites in the city at that time? How did they expect the cemetery to be used by its patrons? These

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<sup>1</sup> Hamlin (2008), Chapter 5.

questions will be answered under the themes of four key motivations: religious freedom, civic pride, access to dignified burial for all and monetary gain.

To conclude, I will examine to what extent these motivations were in alignment: were the government legislators and the Leeds General Cemetery investors motivated by the same concerns?

## **Methodology**

To carry out this research, I explored a number of primary sources. In section one, these comprise contemporary reports from the period, including G.A. Walker's *Gatherings from Graveyards*<sup>2</sup> and Edwin Chadwick's 1843 report on the Sanitary Conditions of Burial, providing a grounding in the conditions of the era and some of the reasons the government began to investigate them within this period. In addition, I explored a number of secondary sources relating to burial reform, in particular, Mary Elizabeth Hotz's paper on Chadwick's motivations for burial reform, which posits his motivations as heavily linked to a desire for social control.<sup>3</sup>

Further, I will examine whether the widely accepted view that legislative measures initiated by Chadwick played a key part in the establishment of general cemeteries,<sup>4</sup> and consider whether this is reflective of the development of the Leeds General Cemetery.

I also drew heavily on the University of Leeds Special Collections Leeds General Cemetery collection. This collection spans from 1833 to present. I predominately examined documents relating the formation of the cemetery company, which included minutes from committee meetings, notes on plans for the cemetery design, correspondence between members of the committee and employees, lists of shareholders, and records of accounts and employment. All of these sources offer an insight to motivations and expectations of the Leeds General Cemetery committee and shareholders.

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<sup>2</sup> Walker (1839)

<sup>3</sup> Hotz, (2001)

<sup>4</sup> Rugg (1998)

I have also made use of the *Leeds Mercury* and *Leeds Intelligencer* newspapers, both of which contain a great deal of discussion on the formation, role and functioning of the cemetery in the form of notices, reports and letters to the editor, providing information as to the wider public's perception of the cemetery.

Together, these sources provide the means to answer the central question of this dissertation: did the same motivations drive the development of both early nineteenth century burial legislation and the Leeds General Cemetery?

## Section 1. Death, Burial and Public Health in early to mid-nineteenth-century

### The Burial Problem in the Nineteenth Century

During the eighteenth century, most people who died in Britain could expect to be interred in their local churchyard following their death. Their service and burial would be arranged by their family and led by their own minister.<sup>5</sup> If the deceased was destitute or had no next of kin to organise their burial, the minister would generally perform this duty and provide a simple Christian funeral, paid for from the parish funds collected as part of the church rate.<sup>6</sup> As a result, burial sites were physically and emotionally close to grieving families, allowing for remembrance to become a part of everyday life. In some larger towns, they were sometimes the only “green space” within walking distance of domestic settings.<sup>7</sup> However, this also meant that burial sites were close to large centres of housing, with numerous people coming into close contact with them. As a result, they often played important roles in terms of social gatherings.<sup>8</sup>

However, the proximity also meant that a poorly-maintained graveyard was regarded to pose a significant threat to public health, as a centre of “putrefication”.<sup>9</sup> As acceptance of miasma theory became increasingly widespread, public attention turned to the issue of the proper way to bury and inter bodies within city limits.

By the early nineteenth century, it was becoming clear that it was an unsustainable approach to dealing with the dead in the modern, post-industrial revolution world. The industrial revolution had led to massive population increase in urban centres.<sup>10</sup> This had two main consequences for burials. Firstly, there were simply more deaths per city per year, which

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<sup>5</sup> Stevens Curl (2004), pg. 12; Ellens (1987)

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> Hotz (2001), pg. 31

<sup>9</sup> See: Chadwick (1843), Walker (1839)

<sup>10</sup> Hotz, (2001)

entailed more expense, more land, more labour, more services to lead.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, as people moved from rural to urban centres in search of work, more people were dying away from their home parish.<sup>12</sup> The number of dead had knock-on effects for city centres: with land at a premium, finding burial space was difficult, and many people grew concerned about the practice of placing overfilled graveyards so close to equally overfilled homes.

These issues demanded reform in the system. It is generally accepted that a great deal of the work to change burial systems was implemented after the 1840s as health and sanitation reforms began to be explored, specifically by the Select Committee on the Health of Towns, and the Select Committee on Intramural Interment.<sup>13</sup> These reports are widely considered to have acted as a catalyst in the increase in the number of burial grounds over the latter-half of the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> It is certainly true that the number of burial grounds hugely increased in this time period:<sup>15</sup> indeed, the *University of York Cemetery Research Group* describes a 'typical British cemetery' as being built between 1850 and 1880.<sup>16</sup> In some cities, cemetery companies for the creation of general, commercial cemeteries were formed by Acts of Parliament. However, these were primarily focused in and around London, most notably producing the 'Magnificent Seven': a series of private cemeteries in central London established in response to the overcrowding of local parish churchyards in the Capital.<sup>17</sup>

However, crowded burial grounds had been a problem long before these reports. Letters to the *Leeds Mercury* detail appalling conditions in the Leeds Cathedral churchyard as early as 1822.<sup>18</sup> Certainly, it takes time for a problem to build to the level of being addressed by a

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pg. 9

<sup>12</sup> Ross, (1979), pg. 16

<sup>13</sup> Fletcher, (1975), pg. 2

<sup>14</sup> See: Fletcher, Hotz, Hurren, Stevens Curl, etc

<sup>15</sup> Rugg, (2014).

<sup>16</sup> Rugg, (2014)

<sup>17</sup> Turpin et. al., (2012)

<sup>18</sup> The *Leeds Mercury*, 11<sup>th</sup> July, 1822 edition contains a note about the decaying state of the Armley parish churchyard, advising that it be avoided if possible.

government committee and in legislation. But why did this happen in the 1840s, when the problem was an obvious source of concern from the turn of the century?

A multitude of factors influenced this reaction. A key factor was the rising prominence of miasma theory,<sup>19</sup> which posited that disease was caused by 'bad air' emanating from rotting organic matter. The graveyard, with its increasingly poorly contained decaying bodies, became a target. Believing that their citizens were being poisoned by inhaling the 'pestiferous exhalations of the dead',<sup>20</sup> politicians set about investigating the harmful nature of graveyards and searching for a solution. This poisoning was believed to lead both to disease and immoral behaviour.<sup>21</sup> The reform work of the 1840s, then, was driven by matters important to those in power: increasing public health, certainly, but also by the need to keep productivity high and to prevent civil unrest.<sup>22</sup>

### **Addressing the Burial Problem**

Due to these issues, ideas about death, dying and the status of corpses underwent significant changes throughout the nineteenth century. Previously held beliefs about the correct and proper way to respectfully mourn and handle the dead came to be challenged by a number of competing ideas: religious convictions, miasma theory and fears of dissections.

In particular, the 1832 cholera epidemic instigated a great deal of discussion regarding the inadequate provision for burial in Leeds.<sup>23</sup> Further, it had raised debate about the status of the body, as had the 1832 Anatomy Act.<sup>24</sup> Population growth had thrown the rank inadequacy of the long used method of interring bodies into stark relief. As churchyards began to overflow, many reports of horrendous conditions were made. People wrote the *Leeds Mercury* to report that bones were washing up out of the grounds in the Cathedral

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<sup>19</sup> Rugg, (1992)

<sup>20</sup> G. A Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, pg. 13

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 23 and pg. 64

<sup>22</sup> Fletcher, (1975), pg. 2

<sup>23</sup> Holland, et. al., (2009), pg. 86

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

yard in heavy rain.<sup>25</sup> Unable to fit new bodies into their yards, some churches began to pile corpses in cellars under chapels and schoolrooms.<sup>26</sup> Obviously, this situation was untenable, and a solution was needed.

Contrastingly, there was also something of a return to the traditional religious significance of interment. The act of burial came to be reconsidered as an important way to express religious convictions, driven in part by the growing voices of Dissenters.<sup>27</sup> By 1837, two major concessions to dissenters were made by Parliament: a more flexible marriage service and a civil system of registration for births, deaths and marriages.<sup>28</sup> Clearly, dissenters had been gaining traction as a force for social and political throughout the decade. Additionally, many people, both Dissenters and members of the Anglican church, returned to a more observant way of religious life as a reaction against the more lax and casual attitude of the Georgian age.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Burial Problem and its Impact on Legislation**

Most of the scholarship surrounding these changes has focused on the latter-half of the nineteenth century, positioning the focus on government men who pushed for legislative change. It is widely accepted that the bulk of these changes were indeed motivated mainly by issues around concerns for public health.

This investigation into the effects of burial and churchyards in urban areas was led primarily by concerns around their potential as a source of epidemics. Miasma theory led men with interests in public health, such as Robert Baker, Edwin Chadwick and G. A. Walker, to explore the potential causes of ill health, which included a focus on graveyards and burial practices. Given the demographics of urban areas in this period, this entailed placing

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<sup>25</sup> Fletcher, (1975), pg. 3

<sup>26</sup> Fletcher, pg. 6

<sup>27</sup> Fletcher, pg. 8

<sup>28</sup> Ellens, (1987), pg. 239

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*

particular emphasis on the mourning and undertaking customs of the working classes.<sup>30</sup> However, burial was considered only one part of broader, more holistic view on improving conditions. Reports produced on the topic, such as Chadwick's report on The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain, include reports on the practice of interment in towns as separate supplements – the focus of these reports was generally on housing.<sup>31</sup> These reports would eventually come to be used in support of introducing new legislation to improve the living conditions of many urban centres.

One example of such a piece of Legislation is the Leeds Improvement Bill of 1842, which included clauses (later to be incorporated into the Local Burial Ground Bill) which allowed the town council to levy a charge to raise the funds to create a new Leeds cemetery.<sup>32</sup> This rate was used to fund the outlay of new burial spaces, such as the Beckett Street Cemetery.<sup>33</sup> The Beckett Street cemetery opened 9 years after the LGC, but it tells us a little about the Leeds General Cemetery. That it was necessary to construct another cemetery so soon after the establishment of the LGC speaks to the scope of the burial problem in Leeds. Further, the Beckett Street cemetery was split, with half of the grounds consecrated for Anglican burial and the remaining acreage open to Dissenters.<sup>34</sup> Each half had its own chapel,<sup>35</sup> speaking to the desire to truly segregate the two groups. Clearly, there were a number of important differences between cemeteries produced by general stock companies (as the LGC was) and those produced by government intervention.

### **Section 1b: the Status of the Corpse in nineteenth century Britain**

Another key change in nineteenth century British attitudes to burial spaces were the changes that took place in attitudes towards the corpse itself. This section will explore three key social

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<sup>30</sup> Rugg, (1992)

<sup>31</sup> See: Chadwick, Walker.

<sup>32</sup> Fletcher, pg. 47

<sup>33</sup> Fletcher, pg. 48

<sup>34</sup> ibid

<sup>35</sup> ibid

factors that led to these changes: attitudes towards laying out, changes in provision of pauper burial, the 1832 Anatomy Act and the Cholera Riots.

### **Laying Out in the Nineteenth Century**

Traditionally, a death in a working-class household would have been met with a complicated process of “laying out”. Performed almost exclusively by women, usually closely related to the deceased, this required the body to be washed and cleaned, orifices to be plugged with wax and cotton, dressed in grave clothes, hair trimmed and other measures to keep the corpse looking presentable.<sup>36</sup>

This laying out had a number of functions in the working class home. It allowed relatives and friends to visit the home of the deceased, offering condolences, support and respects to the bereaved.<sup>37</sup> It served to allow room to mourn, particularly in the case of the death of a spouse or breadwinner, and was sometimes perceived as a final act of caregiving. Laying out as a process of social support would become increasingly important as reformers moved to prevent Sunday funerals, often the only day factory workers could expect to be free to attend a funeral.<sup>38</sup> Further, this often meant that laying out would occur from time of death until following Sunday, as people waited to be able to take time off work to attend.<sup>39</sup>

Further, laying out played an important financial role. Payment for the burial could include separate charges for the shroud, the coffin, digging the grave, lowering the coffin, paying the minister and so on. Some churches even operated a system of “pay-as-you-go” charges for

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<sup>36</sup> Hotz, pg. 10

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, pg. 13

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, pg. 32

the reading of psalms.<sup>41</sup> As such, laying out would have allowed a family time to earn and/or collect money from burial clubs<sup>42</sup> to cover these charges, which were often high and difficult to anticipate.

In contrast, the middle and upper classes outsourced this process to undertakers, who collected the body, removing it from the home within hours of death.<sup>43</sup> Having the financial ability to engage an undertaker and thus avoid the sad and often unpleasant business of cleaning and living around the corpse was a sign of status and power.

### **Chadwick on laying out**

Chadwick's reforms sought to separate the corpse from the home as much as possible. He argued that working class customs were posing a health risk, and so all deaths should be handled as upper-class deaths were. His justification for this was primarily his faith in miasma theory: working class people living around a corpse were exposed to the poisonous miasma, leading to disease, and thus this should be stopped.<sup>44</sup>

However, there was another reason Chadwick sought to separate the corpse from the home. He feared not just the physical health of the working class, but their moral health. In Chadwick's eyes, 'overfamiliarity' with death posed a risk to moral fibre of the working class in two ways. First, there was concern that overfamiliarity with corpses would breed a subtle disrespect for the dead, which would, in turn, lead to desecration of corpses and grave sites.<sup>45</sup> This is echoed in other contemporary works on death and burial, such as Walker's *Gatherings from Graveyards*.<sup>46</sup>

Second, and more complexly, there were fears that this lack of respect for the dead would develop, to use Chadwick's phrasing, 'into a loss of that wholesome fear of death which is

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<sup>41</sup> Leeds General Cemetery Collection, MS 421/1/5/2

<sup>42</sup> Burial clubs were part of the "friendly societies" movement: members would pay into the club weekly or monthly, and if they died without missing payments, their next of kin could collect a lump sum to cover funerary costs.

<sup>43</sup> Hotz, pg.20

<sup>44</sup> Hotz, pg. 4

<sup>45</sup> Hotz, pg. 27

<sup>46</sup> Walker, (1839), pg. 2

the last hold upon a hardened conscience'.<sup>47</sup> In other words, there was concern that if the working classes lost their fear of death (and presumably their fear of a bad afterlife with it) they would become susceptible to immoral thoughts and behaviour.

Chadwick used the example of a Dr. Calvert's study of the Sheffield dry grinders, who often died in their late 20s of lung disease after a decade or so of inhaling ground glass to justify his ideas.<sup>48</sup> Their status as semi-skilled workers combined with an ever-dwindling pool of workers kept wages high, allowing them an extra free day off work per week. According to Chadwick, this leisure was spent in idleness: gambling, carousing and using dogs to poach game.<sup>49</sup> Chadwick's objections to this behaviour were all linked to the fact that they occurred in public: in the gin house, the street, the open ground.

The way to tackle this behavior, then, was to challenge the process of laying out and remove the body from home, whilst working to ensure that burial spaces were quiet, sober and above all fearsome spaces to reflect and repent. In this way, the question of burial in a "modern age" became closely linked to how the working class were to be permitted to use public space. Chadwick's reforms, whilst with an aim towards the greater good, often left the working class pushed out of public life, without means to adhere to expected cultural customs and norms.

However, if Chadwick feared that the working classes were losing their fear of death, the working classes retained other anxieties about the end of their life. A great body of evidence suggests that even if workers were losing their death itself, a variety of factors made them fearful of the fate of their corpses. The idea of facing a pauper burial, or worse, dissection was a great source of fear and loathing in nineteenth century working class circles.

<sup>47</sup> Hotz, pg. 27

<sup>48</sup> Hotz, pg. 28

<sup>49</sup> Hotz, pg. 29

## Pauper Burials

Those who died a pauper (i.e. in a workhouse or otherwise living through relief provided by the Poor Law) faced the probability of a pauper's funeral. Such a "funeral" involved being placed in a mass grave, unmarked and sometimes uncovered, without a shroud or coffin. These mass graves would be reopened frequently, posing risks for corpses to be desecrated or 'snatched'.<sup>50</sup> The lack of marker and privacy meant that any living relatives or friend would be denied a place to reflect on their lost loved one.

In this way, a pauper burial became a symbol of ultimate indignity and was to be avoided at all costs. Any money that could be raised by the family of the deceased was likely to be 'pressed into the service of a decent burial'.<sup>51</sup>

This was a cause for concern for the poor of all major cities. The industrial revolution spurred massive population growth which, in turn, increased the number of those in need of poor law relief, both in terms of workhouse spaces and those requiring 'outdoor relief'. However, it was perhaps especially pressing in the North of England. In Manchester, for example, poverty was particularly rife: from 1801 to 1831 the amount spent on poor relief increased by almost 500 percent, with up to 23 percent of the population relying on poor relief at some point each year.<sup>52</sup>

Further, the transient nature of many poor workers meant that those who died were not always the responsibility of the parish in which they died. This caused difficulties in record-keeping and stretched already limited resources even thinner. In some, though not all, cases, these factors encouraged cold and mercenary treatment of paupers, particularly under the New Poor Law.<sup>53</sup>

For example, under the Old Poor Law, the Brixworth Poor Law Union had provided relatively dignified pauper burials – a "nurse" to wash and lay out the body, a woollen shroud, a

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<sup>50</sup> Hurren, (2005), pg. 318

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, pg. 322

<sup>52</sup> Hurren, (2005), pg. 326

<sup>53</sup> ibid

wooden coffin, a Christian service and the burial itself.<sup>54</sup> This slowly became less and less manageable after the introduction of the controversial New Poor Law in 1834. By the 1870s, the Union had calculated that if pauper burial provision was done away with altogether and the cadavers were sold to local medical schools, they could recoup their “investment” of welfare in death.<sup>55</sup>

This controversy over the rights of the poor to a decent burial is clearly reflected in the operations of a number of cemeteries opening in this time, such as Norwich’s Rosary Cemetery established 1819, the Sheffield General Cemetery (1836) and the Leeds General Cemetery company (1833). Having opened some years before the amendments to the Poor Law all added clear provisions to provide dignified, low cost burials for the poor in the years following 1834.<sup>56</sup>

### **The Anatomy Act**

A further source of concern was the changing status of corpses in relation to legislation was the 1832 Anatomy Act. Prior to 1832, the dissection of bodies was subject to strict limitations.<sup>57</sup> A 1541 law established a precedent in which the Royal Company of Barbers and Surgeons were permitted to dissect a maximum of four executed felons per year.<sup>58</sup> The 1752 Murder Act, introduced in response to a murder rate that was perceived to be rising, allowed for the dissection of the bodies of executed murderers. This was explicitly stated to be a further deterrent, intended to add ‘some further terror and peculiar infamy’ to the punishment of execution.<sup>59</sup> Dissection at this time was unequivocally to be considered degrading and unchristian.

This staunchly negative perception of dissection led to a great deal of unsavoury and illegal behaviour surrounding the acquisition of corpses for dissection. One surgeon noted that

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, pg. 327

<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Rugg, (1992)

<sup>57</sup> Knott, (1985), pg. 2

<sup>58</sup> Ross, (1979), pg. 3

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, pg. 4

some medical men would pose as relatives of executed criminals retrieving the corpse for burial, rather than admit they were surgeons and face the disapproval of the public.<sup>60</sup> The infamous murders by Burke and Hare, who were convicted of committing sixteen murders in the late 1820s in order to sell the bodies of their victims on to a Dr Robert Knox for dissection, had also caught the attention of the public causing fear and anxiety about the security of grave sites.<sup>61</sup>

The Anatomy Act was intended to increase the number of bodies available for dissection by medical students. Parliament recognised that new knowledge about the care and treatment of illness and injury 'cannot be acquired without the aid anatomical examination'.<sup>62</sup>

However, Parliament was also aware of the lawbreaking surrounding the acquisition of corpses and thus sought to create an act which would allow for freer "trade" in corpses, thereby rendering the black market unnecessary. Previous legislation had been brought to the House of Commons only to be thrown out by the House of Lords, but the infamy of the Burke and Hare case had made regulating corpses for medical schools a pressing issue.<sup>63</sup>

Consequently, the Anatomy Act of 1832 made it legal for a far broader variety of bodies to be used by medical men for the purposes of dissection. Specifically, it allowed any medical practitioner, teacher or student to apply for a license to dissect 'unclaimed bodies',<sup>64</sup> after which the body must be 'decently interred'.<sup>65</sup> The majority of these unclaimed bodies belonged to those who died in the workhouse and decent interment was by no means guaranteed in the period. Thus, the Anatomy Act served to terrorise and unsettle the working classes. With the enactment of the New Poor Law, the workhouse was a looming spectre in the lives of the poor, and they now faced the prospect of their remains being treated like the corpse of a felon. This suggested that dying poor was almost a criminal act, and it almost

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<sup>60</sup> I. Ross (1979), pg. 4

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, pg. 12

<sup>62</sup> 1832 Anatomy Act, accessed via <[https://archive.org/stream/b21520483/b21520483\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/b21520483/b21520483_djvu.txt)>

<sup>63</sup> ibid

<sup>64</sup> Multiple authors, 'The anatomy act, 1832 ; the pharmacy act, 1852 ; the pharmacy act, 1869 ; the anatomy act, 1871', section 12, accessed 08/03/2017 via <<https://archive.org/stream/b21520483/b21520483djvu.txt>>

<sup>65</sup> Multiple authors, 'The anatomy act, 1832 ; the pharmacy act, 1852 ; the pharmacy act, 1869 ; the anatomy act, 1871', section 12, accessed 08/03/2017 via <<https://archive.org/stream/b21520483/b21520483djvu.txt>>

certainly contributed to the high levels of concern and desperate attempts to save made by the working classes.<sup>66</sup>

### **The Cholera Riots**

Another example of the changing status of corpse can be seen in public response to the cholera epidemic of the 1832. This outbreak of cholera raged from late May until early November, leading to 1817 recorded cases and was responsible for the deaths of 702 people in that time – more died from resulting weakness, dehydration and malnutrition.<sup>67</sup> The churchyards struggled to cope with the volume of bodies and fears of furthering the epidemic by burying victims so close to homes were high.

However, it also incited a violent reaction, as fear and unrest turned into civil disobedience. Many of these ‘mobs’ trained their sights on doctors, who they saw to be both failing to do their jobs and failing to protect the bodies of those who had fallen to the disease.<sup>68</sup> Other incidents occurred as townspeople feared that doctors were acting as agents of disease, and thus attacked medical men as they left the houses of patients. One doctor was attacked by a mob who accused him of attempting to take the body of the cholera victim he’d been treating for dissection.<sup>69</sup> Other incidents broke out as townspeople attempted to stop still-living victims of cholera being moved to hospitals, or deceased victims from being moved to burial grounds.

These incidents were both motivated by two concerns on the part of the rioters. Firstly, the local population feared that doctors would carry the disease with them into the community through miasma, thus furthering the epidemic and leading to more deaths. Second, many feared that the bodies of their friends and family would fall into the hands of doctors who would dissect them without consent.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Hurren, et. al

<sup>67</sup> Holland et. al. (2009), appendix II

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, pg. 128

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, pg. 130

<sup>70</sup> ibid

The cholera riots of the early 1800s were strongly focused on the status of corpses. However, this status was assessed from two contradictory viewpoints: corpses as being sacred and worthy of protection from dissection and poor treatment, and corpses as posing a risk to the living, through their status as agents of disease and sources of miasma. Both of these viewpoints would come to affect the way in which cemeteries were managed in terms of organisation and layout.

## Section 2

### A Case Study: Leeds General Cemetery

Having discussed the background causes that led to a need for burial reform in **Section 1**, it is useful to explore how these changes in theory and legislation came to manifest themselves in practise. In **Section 2**, I will consider how these changes relate to the foundation, planning and operation of the Leeds General Cemetery.

The Leeds General Cemetery occupies a peculiar space in the historiography of nineteenth century burial. With its first general committee meeting occurring in 1822, it predates the majority of the “official”, legislative discussion of interment by a full decade at least. However, it is clear from periodicals of the time, that burial and interment was a topic of public interest and debate from the 1810s onwards,<sup>71</sup> particularly regarding British reactions to the Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris.<sup>72</sup> Further, having been first discussed in 1826, but not opening until 1833, it spans both of the two periods outlined by Rugg: 1820 to 1832 as a period in which the opening of cemeteries tended to be motivated by Dissenting views and fear of dissection, and 1833 to 1839, when many cemeteries were formed as profiteering exercises.<sup>73</sup> Given this ‘in between’ period, the Leeds General Cemetery provides an opportunity to examine both how cemeteries were established before these legislative changes, and how existing cemeteries reacted to the changes, both legislative and social, of the nineteenth century.

### The Reasons for a New Cemetery

The *Leeds Mercury* was a central forum for the discussion of all issues affecting the city of Leeds and came to play a central role in the establishment of the Leeds General Cemetery. A newspaper with a circulation of 5,500 in the 1830s, rising to 10,000 by the 1840s,<sup>74</sup> and generally Whig-supporting political leaning, the *Mercury* often printed letters to the editor

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<sup>71</sup> Rugg, (1992). See also: Chamber’s Edinburgh Journal,

<sup>72</sup> Tarlow (2000)

<sup>73</sup> Rugg,

<sup>74</sup> Coleman et. al., (2016)

regarding the state of burial sites in Leeds. A letter which proposed the building of a new general cemetery initiated the forming of the committee of the Leeds General Cemetery. The *Mercury* also played a role in advertising the sale of shares. Once it had been built, the *Mercury* also advertised the opening of the cemetery through a detailed report of the first funeral conducted there. Regular readers of the paper would also have been aware of the legislative changes taking place.<sup>75</sup> The Leeds General Cemetery opened in 1833, but the process of forming a committee and building it had begun seven years earlier.

A letter published in the *Leeds Mercury* on September 9<sup>th</sup> 1826 is one of the first recorded references to establishing a new and different kind of burial ground in Leeds. This letter expressed a variety of different motivations for involvement in such a cemetery. The letter writer, who signed themselves Mausolus,<sup>76</sup> began by describing the ‘disgrace[ful]’ state of the available burial grounds, referencing the apparently commonplace occurrence of churchyards being ‘scattered with human bones’.<sup>77</sup> This problem also appears to have been rooted in a disrespect towards the users, both living and dead, which was built into its management and labour structure – Mausolus alluded to the disrespectful actions of the sextons who allowed these ‘overcrowded’ churchyards to get into such a state.<sup>78</sup>

However, as would be repeated throughout the founding of the Leeds General Cemetery, the intentions of the anonymous author are firmly centered on improving the lot of the living, not the dead. In response to the terrible conditions of burial sites, he stated that ‘it is true that the dead are indifferent to such matters’, and implored readers to consider the health and feelings of the living.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> See: *Mercury* note

<sup>76</sup> An anonymising pseudonym based on Mausolus, King of Caria whose tomb is used even today as architectural inspiration.

<sup>77</sup> Leeds Mercury, 9th Sept 1826

<sup>78</sup> Leeds Mercury, 9th Sept 1826

<sup>79</sup> *ibid*

As in many other commentaries, the graveyard is here viewed as a source of disease, citing its role as ‘a place of putrefaction’ both in the ground and in the air.<sup>80</sup> However, tellingly little of the letter is devoted to the “public graveyards for public health” argument.

Instead, the bulk of the letter addressed the success of cemeteries in other cities near and far, most notably Pere Lachaise.

Opened in Paris, France in 1804, Pere Lachaise caught the imagination of the British public through reports of visits in periodicals, as well as through public spectacles such as dioramas.<sup>81</sup> Despite the recent Napoleonic Wars and France’s Catholicism, Pere Lachaise came to be considered something of a “brand”, the model of the modern cemetery.<sup>82</sup> This has posed something of an issue to modern scholarship on the general cemetery, as accounts of British burial practices of the period often borrow heavily from the historiography of French burial practices in the wake of both the French Revolution and the Age of Enlightenment.<sup>83</sup> Pere Lachaise, as a well-known and ground-breaking cemetery, is often proposed to have had a measurable impact on the development, design and provision of burial spaces in nineteenth century Britain.<sup>84</sup>

This certainly seems to have been the case for Mausolus, who drew heavily on the widespread popularity of Pere Lachaise to convince readers of the necessity of such a ground in Leeds. He stressed not the efficiency, but the pleasantness of Pere Lachaise. The author also drew clear comparisons between the nearby Liverpool cemeteries and the available spaces of Leeds of a similar size (‘five acres’) which may be had ‘on very reasonable terms [...] especially at the moment’. It spoke of the townwide, aesthetic benefits of a well maintained cemetery, citing the benefits of Pere Lachaise not as a sanitary solution to the interment of the growing population but as a tourist attraction. The ‘delightful spot’ not only provides a practical final resting place for loved ones, but is a credit to the city. Establishing this new Leeds cemetery was thus a

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<sup>80</sup> *ibid*

<sup>81</sup> Stevens Curl, (2004) pg. 128

<sup>82</sup> Rugg, (1992)

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>84</sup> *ibid*

matter of civic pride and competition between northern industrial cities. This is implied even more heavily in Mausolus's flattering discussion of the Liverpool cemetery as having sprung from the 'wealth, intelligence and public spirit of its inhabitants'. He questioned why Leeds did not yet have a 'spacious and beautiful' public burial, clearly pitting the two industrial centers against one another.

However, 'Mausolus' also stressed that such a cemetery would need to be 'open to all denominations of Christians' and would have to incur 'only moderate expenses' to truly be of benefit to the whole population of Leeds. This idea that the proposed cemetery should be affordable to all at point of use seems to have been a core idea, as it is also central to how the author suggested capital should be raised. Through selling shares 'priced low at £10 a share', the company would share the burden of the high initial outlay among the moderately wealthy and prevent a monopoly. This emphasis on openness would come to be a core motivator for many of Leeds General Cemetery shareholders and committee members becoming invested, financially or otherwise, in the establishment and maintenance of a public burial ground in the city of Leeds.<sup>85</sup>

There were obviously a variety of reasons each shareholder chose to invest in such an enterprise. The rest of this section will explore how these factors interacted in the foundation and running of the Leeds General Cemetery.

### **The Founding of Leeds General Cemetery**

A committee was formed in response to Masolus's letter, and soon after the *Mercury* reported that a general meeting had been held to discuss the £200,000 stock and the purchase of 80 acres of land. This first attempt appears to have stalled, as no further reports are made until 1832, when a report on the Dissenter cemeteries of nearby Manchester and Liverpool begs 'public-spirited Leeds' readers to 'take up this long-talked of matter and carry

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<sup>85</sup> See: **Shareholders**

the existing plan into execution'.<sup>86</sup> Although over such a time period, it is evident that a number of the same investors stuck with this first attempt through to 1833 and beyond.<sup>87</sup>

Further discussion shows that 'public-spiritedness' is indeed a central draw to those who came to join the committee. In a later editorial, a resident under the penname 'Leodensian' stressed the positive effect a general cemetery would likely have on the 'moral habits' of the populace, and asserted that spending time in a cemetery would return the thoughts of the 'careless and gay' towards their 'frail tenure' on the earth, expressing quite the same line of thinking as Edwin Chadwick -- that the poor must be reminded of their impending deaths in order to be turned towards religious observance and away from frivolity.

Leodensian's references to public-spiritedness took on a tone almost reminiscent of vigilantism, as they referred to their surprise that 'meddling legislators' had not yet intervened to put to end the 'pestilential effluvia arising [from the churchyards] poisoning the very air we breathe',<sup>88</sup> especially given the 'dense population' of Leeds. They hoped the 'good spirit' of local men will put right what 'the folly and neglect of legislature' had left a danger to the city. The letter ended with a reference to the success of the general cemeteries constructed in Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle, again suggesting that a general cemetery would a matter of civic pride.

It is clear from both of these editorial letters that there were a huge number of factors that each author expected to motivate prospective shareholders to invest their money, time and energy in a new cemetery: civic pride, public health, religious concerns and monetary gain among them. The complete list of shareholders provides some insight into which of these motivations actually came to bear on the future of the LGC.

The largest indicator that the Leeds General Cemetery was fueled by notions of local pride is the overwhelming number of Leeds-based shareholders. The vast majority of

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<sup>86</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 'Editorial', 16<sup>th</sup> March 1833

<sup>87</sup> Notably the Lupton investors and the Harveys. See: MS 421/1/3/4

<sup>88</sup> Leodensian, *Leeds Mercury*, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1833

shareholders were based in central Leeds: 157 of the 167 shareholders are listed as living in Leeds or within 3 miles of it. Many of these local investors would eventually be buried in the Leeds General Cemetery themselves, such as Thomas Luccock and Susannah Liebreich,<sup>89</sup> suggesting that for some, they were investing in a cemetery in the hopes of securing their own dignified burial in future.

This focus on civic pride is supported by other notes within the archive. One folder contains a huge number of handbills from cemeteries in nearby cities, such as the Liverpool Necropolis and the cemetery of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It is unclear who exactly collected these, but the fact that they were collected combined with the fact that many predate the opening of the Leeds General Cemetery indicates that comparison between Leeds and these other Northern city cemeteries played a large role in the motivation of the creation of the cemetery.

Another potential motivation is the desire to provide accessible, low cost burials, as mentioned in both newspaper articles. This is further supported by a small card-bound notebook kept by John Hardisty of Harrogate, who was both a shareholder and a member of the committee. The book is undated but is presumably from early in the LGC company's existence given the cemeteries listed within. It contains a huge series of notes on the prices at various existing cemeteries. It systematically details the charges made at Newcastle, Liverpool Necropolis and the Brunswick Methodist cemetery in Leeds, including the prices of different types of burials, memorials and services. Later in the notebook, a direct comparison was made between these prices and those that could be offered at the Leeds General Cemetery. The reams of charges listed here provide a deeper understanding what LGC was up against in terms of making burial cost effective and accessible. A few of these competing cemeteries offer prices comparable to those at the LGC, such as Liverpool Necropolis which only a penny or two more expensive per standard burial. However most are more expensive in every way: charges for land, burial

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<sup>89</sup> Leeds General Cemetery, Special Collections, MS 421/3/1/4

and memorial masonry were all priced higher than those at LGC. Further, the Methodist Chapel at Brunswick appears to have charged for a multitude of details that were absent at other cemeteries: charges to reserve a pew in the chapel, charges for the disposal of earth and turf removed from graves, charges to move the coffin from chapel to grave if extra pallbearers were needed.<sup>90</sup>

Other handbills from other cemeteries demonstrate the dizzying array of burial practices available to mourners in the nineteenth century. Funeral services in this era were highly customisable – as we have seen, the organiser of a funeral can specify not just the time, date and place of burial, but the depth of grave ('six feet as standard, nine feet at an additional charge, then one shilling per foot'),<sup>91</sup> the style of stone and the length of the ceremony. At St. Mark's cemetery,<sup>92</sup> charges are made separately for the Vicar at 8d, each 'additional psalm of choice' at one shilling and each 'additional set of bell ringing' at one shilling.<sup>93</sup> Further, each funeral was given an allotted time, and services that overran would face a fine of one shilling for per five minutes over.<sup>94</sup> These fines were not entirely profiteering, it seems, as they were to be 'collected for the benefit of Feather Hill School'.<sup>95</sup>

This is without even mentioning the huge variety of memorials available through cemetery masons, with a huge variety of shapes and sizes of gravestones on offer, and text charged per letter, with higher prices for small caps or heading text. Wealthy families burying relatives could add sculptures or gilt or marble to an ever standing memorial, and in Victorian England, each type of monument had a specific meaning to any who understood the symbolism. A broken pillar indicated that the interred had died young of illness or injury and urns and wreathes were often used at the graves of those involved with local governance.

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<sup>90</sup> Leeds General Cemetery Collection, Special Collections MS421/1/2/8

<sup>91</sup> Leeds General Cemetery Collection, Special Collections MS421/1/2/8

<sup>92</sup> This is almost certainly a St. Mark's Cemetery located in Yorkshire, but whether it is the St. Mark's Cemetery located in Leeds from 1857 or a separate burial ground in Scarborough is uncertain. Given the dates of the other cemetery handbills in this collection, it is likely to be the earlier Scarborough ground.

<sup>93</sup> 'Handbill of St. Marks: List of Services and Charges', MS421/1/2/8

<sup>94</sup> Leeds General Cemetery Collection, Special Collections MS421/1/2/8

<sup>95</sup> Leeds General Cemetery Collection, Special Collections MS421/1/2/8

All of these optional extras came to engender a sense of competition and status-seeking around burial and funeral rites, which was heavily bound in class. Throughout the nineteenth century, attitudes towards death and mourning, particularly with regards to how public this process should be, underwent change. Chadwick's 1843 report noted that, for working class people, the desire to secure a decent burial often outweighed all other wants, with people neglecting both their own and their families' health in order to devote their limited means to save for potential funeral expenses.<sup>96</sup>

For many of the shareholders, a distaste for these extravagant burials, which encouraged both the working and middle classes to spend above their means would have been seen as immoral. Dissenters generally objected to lavish funerals on religious grounds,<sup>97</sup> and many shareholders were engaged in philanthropic enterprises to improve the lives of those in poverty.

One the main investors, George Goodman, purchased his 10 shares in 1833, at which time he was a wool-merchant. He was a practising Baptist, and involved in many other local social enterprises, such as the Leeds Theosophical and Literary Society.<sup>98</sup> By 1836, he was elected Mayor of Leeds and spent much of his life as a Liberal MP.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, Benjamin Gott, a leading figure in the industrial revolution, the founder of a number of almshouses in Armley and another member of the Leeds Theosophical and Literary Society,<sup>100</sup> also invested the sum of £100 in the cemetery.<sup>101</sup>

For some shareholders investment in the Leeds General Cemetery was a family affair: the Clapham, Glover, Grace, Lupton, Luccock and Rawson families all held multiple shares jointly, with many also having one or members sitting on the committee. Many of these families were well for their philanthropic and social justice activities: the ten Luptons listed

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<sup>96</sup> Cannon, et al., pg. 438

<sup>97</sup> *ibid*

<sup>98</sup> 'Leeds Man', (1868).

<sup>99</sup> *ibid*

<sup>100</sup> Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed via <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/49/101049967/>>

<sup>101</sup> Fletcher, pg. 114

here (holding 23 shares between them) were notable figures in the women's suffrage movement, the Unitarian church and the campaign for the abolition of slavery.<sup>102</sup>

The 1833 list of shareholders also included a sizeable number of women, with 21 out of 167 investors being female, or 12.67%. Many of these were spinsters and widows, such as Elizabeth, Lydia and Margaret Harvey of Liverpool, three spinsters, presumably sisters. Given that these women supported themselves through private means, they may have viewed the cemetery as a sound investment both financially and philanthropically. Although permitted to hold shares and vote on matters relating to their investment, women shareholders were not permitted to attend the general meetings held at the Leeds Courthouse.<sup>103</sup>

Also entitled to vote only by post or proxy were the few investors who came from much further afield, such as Edward Hutton, a surgeon from Dublin who held 5 shares, and Edward Steer, a Gentleman from Hamburg who purchased 10. How or why these men came to invest in a general cemetery in Leeds is unknown. However, their involvement suggests that whilst many investors were investing for their own benefit or for the benefit of their local area, there were those who were investing for purely financial reasons. Steer and Hutton, neither having obvious connections to Leeds or Yorkshire, nor any recorded Dissenting sympathies, were likely viewing the Leeds General Cemetery purely as an investment opportunity. They are unlikely to be the only ones on this list interested in the monetary gains to be had in the cemetery: a letter to selected shareholders in the Cemetery collections argued that a cemetery would be 'the most profitable use of empty land outside of a quarry or a mine to be had in this day and age.'<sup>104</sup>

Ultimately, the large number of diverse investors means that many different motivations were likely to have had a strong impact on individual investors. However, it is clear from the

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<sup>102</sup> Oxford Dictionary of Nation Biography, entries on Francis Lupton, Arthur Lupton and Ann Lupton.

<sup>103</sup> Fletcher (1975), pg. 114

<sup>104</sup> MS 421/1/6/4

design and maintenance of the LGC that two of these had a stronger place in the committee than others: namely, religious freedom and civic pride.

### **Designing the Leeds General Cemetery**

The committee's hopes for Leeds General Cemetery can be seen through the sheer amount of work they put into the planning and design of the cemetery ground itself. The design of the cemetery was a gargantuan task with myriad individual elements: the size and location needed to be agreed upon, as well as the style and features; then the land needed to be found, bought, levelled, planted and prepared -- all before the actual construction of the cemetery could begin. The vast majority of these decisions were made through general meetings of the committee, which were called regularly.

To handle the design of the cemetery itself, the committee launched a design competition, calling for architects and landscapers to submit their designs for the grounds based on some fairly specific and stringent requirements. Reflecting the amount of work this required, the reward was a substantial 20 guineas. This contest was widely publicised, with advertisements being placed in both major Leeds newspapers, the *Mercury* and the *Intelligencer*, as well as the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Liverpool Times* and some periodicals based in Birmingham and Edinburgh.<sup>105</sup> The submissions they received reflected this distribution, with the majority of the plans received from local men within Yorkshire.

However, some came from as far afield as London, Bristol and Edinburgh.

The merits of each plan was then assessed by a sub-committee. The unsuccessful entries appear to have either been discarded or returned to their senders. However, a notebook kept by an anonymous member of the committee containing brief notes on each design, shows that they received seventeen submissions, fourteen of which were dismissed out of hand for failing to meet the criteria advertised. The harshest of these was about the

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<sup>105</sup> Fletcher (1975), pg. 18.

seventeenth, which is attributed only to 'a young amateur' and simply notes that the plan has been 'refused'.<sup>106</sup>

These notes on design entries show what the committee were prioritising in both the form and function of the cemetery. The rejected designs show that the committee considered price to be a major factor in their selection: of seventeen designs, three were noted to be too costly, with estimates at £7,298, £8,132 and £9,120 respectively. However, the first of these was eventually short-listed despite concerns over its cost, perhaps as other "lower priced" plans were found to have omitted several important costs from their estimates, such as drainage and layout.

Other plans were rejected on the basis that they included 'basic mistakes in ground plan', and the presence of 'several undesirable features for public wellbeing'<sup>107</sup> such as a row of houses to be built on the eastern wall, showing the public health and sanitation concerns of the committee.

One plan from a J. P. Pritchett of York was short-listed despite lacking a pretty central feature of cemetery design: it contained no plan of graves.<sup>108</sup> The fact that the sub-committee were happy to endorse a plan that lacked provision for the graves themselves is telling. It suggests that, for the committee, acting as a place of burial was perhaps not the most important function of the cemetery. Instead, the plans that were short-listed are noted to have been chosen primarily based on their 'attractiveness', likely due to the committee's aim to provide a burial ground that would also be a pleasant green space, as noted in their first report.<sup>109</sup>

Overall, the committee's response to the designs show that there was a strong emphasis on making the cemetery a pleasant place to be, both as a measure of respect to the patrons and to improve Leeds as a town.

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<sup>106</sup> Leeds General Cemetery Collection, MS 421/1/2/5

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, item 4

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, item 4

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 'First Report'.

## The Running of the Leeds General Cemetery

Having taken such care in ensuring the design of the cemetery reflected their ideals, the committee faced some issues running the cemetery to the same stringent values. The Leeds General Cemetery was not universally adored in its beginning, with criticisms being directed at its business practice, its open-to-all ethos and its pricing.

The earliest clash with local businessmen came as construction was just getting underway. Having purchased some of the land from a Mr J. Wainwright, an argument broke out between the committee and the Wainwrights over two issues: the precise boundaries of the land they had purchased and who was responsible for drainage work carried out on the land before the purchase had been finalised. This argument was to rage for nearly a decade until Mr J. Wainwright Sr's death.<sup>110</sup> Some of the committee noted their suspicions that Wainwright had not realised he was selling land to a non-Anglican burial enterprise, whilst other merely suspected him of 'commonplace greed'.<sup>111</sup>

In a letter to the Leeds Intelligencer on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, 1840<sup>112</sup> Reverend James Fawcett, accused the proprietors of the Leeds General Cemetery of conducting too many 'socialist' funerals with 'abominable views' in the cemetery, and letting the chapel to be used to promote godlessness by allowing funeral readings to include phrases that implied that 'man is like the beasts that perish', thus undermining the Church of England's doctrine of anthropocentrism (or at least, Reverend Fawcett's interpretation of that doctrine). To close, he demanded that 'this freedom be speedily altered'.<sup>113</sup> Evidently, the LGC was being used for precisely the kind of rabble-rousing that Chadwick detailed in his report three years later.

The chairman of the company at that time, Arthur Lupton wrote a reply, stating that company had 'entirely nothing to do' with the content of any funeral conducted on their grounds, and that the role planning and delivering the content, including the choice of religious minister,

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<sup>110</sup> Fletcher, pg. 34

<sup>111</sup> Leeds General Cemetery Collections, MS 421/121

<sup>112</sup> Leeds Intelligencer, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1840

<sup>113</sup> *ibid*

was left 'solely to the discretion of the friends of the deceased'. He also lays out in this letter the cemetery's 'duty to provide full rights to those buried there'.<sup>114</sup>

This strong choice of words clearly indicates that Lupton felt that the non-denominational and universal nature of their cemetery was a core and central value to their enterprise. Evidently, the chairman as a representative of the committee, considers the social role of the cemetery to be a core value: anyone choosing to use the Leeds General Cemetery was entitled to express their beliefs as they saw fit, whether religious, political or personal in nature, and Lupton was keen to make this known publicly.

This is further supported by a *Mercury* editorial from the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 1833, which states the author's enthusiasm for the fact that those general cemeteries which had been established in Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle had come into 'very general and varied use'. This editorial indicates two core beliefs of the Leeds General Cemetery. Firstly, it again evidences that those invested in the Leeds General Cemetery committed to the idea of a universal cemetery, and that the use of the cemetery by all faiths and denominations was something they valued highly in their own enterprise. Secondly, it again shows that the investors were looking to other nearby, competing cities in their interest to establish a general cemetery for Leeds.

However, it is relatively clear that this dream of a cemetery that would be truly open and available to all, regardless of faith, class or political beliefs, was not easy to achieve in reality. According to Robert Baker's report, approximately 80% of the population of Leeds were occupied as labourers,<sup>115</sup> but operatives and labourers make a very small percentage of burials in the first few years of its operation. In the first three volumes of burial registers, recording all burials in the grounds from the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 1835 to the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 1849, only thirty-one record the occupation of the deceased as 'labourer', 'operative' or 'worker'. There

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<sup>114</sup> Fletcher, (1975), pg. 45

<sup>115</sup> R Baker, *Report on the condition of the residences of the labouring classes in the town of Leeds*, 1842, pg. 24

are a number of possible causes of this disparity. It may have been the case that plots were prohibitively expensive for members of the working class. It may also be due to the fact that the vast majority of those buried within the cemetery, both during this period and by the end of its service, were infants and children, and thus had no recorded occupation.

This problem of accessibility to the working classes, and particularly that of the children was the working class was explicitly addressed by a 1842 note to the committee from Reverend James Rawson, the chaplain of the Leeds General Cemetery urging the committee to set aside the South East corner of the grounds for low-cost, simple burials for poor children.<sup>116</sup> Clearly, it was important to the chaplain that people not be denied burial for lack of means.

Further, the role of the chaplain in the Leeds General Cemetery is well-recorded and provides an excellent view into both the spiritual and practical direction and leadership of the cemetery. The Reverend James Rawson was recruited to the role of Chaplain through an advertisement placed in various periodicals. Trained as an Independent Minister in Pontefract, Rawson would hold the role of both Chaplain and Registrar from the opening of the LGC in 1833 until 1845.<sup>117</sup>

As chaplain, Rawson was responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of the users of the cemetery. He was usually the first point of contact for bereaved people inquiring about burying their deceased friend or relative. The burial registers of the LGC show that it was overwhelmingly Rawson who conducted the services of funerals.<sup>118</sup> As registrar, he was responsible for creating and maintaining accurate records of the burials that took place, including information on the names, occupation, parents and cause of death of the deceased.

Both of these roles commanded a good amount of power, authority and respect. Two incidents from the history of the Leeds General Cemetery company exemplify just how influential the chaplain was as a member of the wider community: his power in influencing the running of the cemetery and the circumstances of his eventual, dramatic resignation.

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<sup>116</sup> Leeds General Cemetery Collections, MS 421/121

<sup>117</sup> Fletcher, pg. 18

<sup>118</sup> Leeds General Cemetery Collections, MS 421/1/3

Throughout his tenure as registrar, Rawson penned several strong letters to the chairman of the company with the aim of convincing the LGC Company to alter its management. He clearly held influence in both the economic and practical running of the cemetery and its spiritual and philanthropic goals. One such example, a letter written on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 1842 detailed his 'apprehension and alarm' following the proposal of another, competing burial ground to be opened in Leeds, 'lest it should have unfavourable effects on our [...] cemetery'. He stated his worries that if this new cemetery ground were to be made 'attractive and popular' it would pose a threat to the LGC. He went on to detail his 'exceeding regret' that the LGC had failed to make adequate arrangements to provide for the burial of the poor. Shortly after this letter was received, the committee produced a memorandum calling for the east side of the grounds (at that time kept as a garden by shareholder Henry Edmondson) to be turned over for low-priced burials of the poor.<sup>119</sup>

Clearly, Rawson had a degree of power over the day-to-day practical running of the cemetery. He was confident enough to freely share his opinions with the Leeds General Cemetery company. Further, his ideas were quickly acted upon, even when this meant inconveniencing a principal shareholder.

However, it is the circumstances surrounding Rawson's resignation that show the full extent of Rawson's role of registrar on the wider community of Leeds.

In November of 1845, Rev. James Rawson apparently went missing from Leeds, absent from his post without leave from the committee. A letter dated November 19<sup>th</sup> 1845, written by James Rawson's brother Henry explained this sudden desertion of his post.<sup>120</sup>

He stated that James had fled to his home of Pontefract following two accusations made to Arthur Lupton, now chair of the committee: one from John Hardisty and another, separate complaint from a Mr. Strickland, a mason who had produced a great deal of stonework for

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<sup>119</sup> Fletcher, pg. 15

<sup>120</sup> Leeds General Cemetery Collection, Special Collections MS 421/1/2/20

the cemetery.<sup>121</sup> Strickland had apparently accused Rawson of 'financial dishonesty', whilst Hardisty's complaint related to Rawson's alleged overfondness of drink. These accusations, said Henry, were more than James's 'mind could bear', causing the abandonment of his post. Henry was emphatic that both of these accusations were untrue and unsubstantiated, and reported his brother's denial that he had ever 'taken even a flagon of beer on cemetery grounds', let alone 'officiated drunk'. The accusation of financial dishonesty goes almost unaddressed within this letter, with Henry reporting only that James insists his records and accounts are in order. Much more of the letter is devoted to the allegations of drunkenness. However, Henry admitted that he could not justify his brother's abandonment of his post. Further, Henry tellingly stated that he felt a 'public officer such as Registrar of a Cemetery' should be 'free of any reproach'. It is clear from this letter that James's role as Registrar was one of high-standing and great import within the wider community of Leeds. This is supported by another letter, enclosed with Henry's: James Rawson's own resignation.

James's resignation was similar to the letter sent by his brother: it detailed his fleeing, but it did so in much more emotive terms than his brother's recounting: 'I will thank you to state to the committee that I returned home on Monday evening [...] due to the disbelief of mind caused by the malignant charges brought against me which overpowered my feelings and prostrated my judgement.' James Rawson argued that 'through the pleasing confidence' both the Leeds General Cemetery committee and the wider community had in his work, he would be able to 'repel' the accusations. However, like his brother, he felt that 'registrar's reputation should not merely but unblemished but should be unsuspected'. He finished by thanking the chairman for his support over the years, and then announced his resignation from the post.<sup>122</sup>

This affair was quite clearly a scandal in the eyes of all involved. Although discussion of the matter is conspicuously absent from the *Leeds Mercury* in the following weeks, it

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<sup>121</sup> Leeds General Cemetery Collection, Special Collections MS 421/1/2/9 item no. 30

<sup>122</sup> MS 421/1/2/20

caused a great deal of change in the running of the cemetery as a whole in rapid succession. The accusations were made on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November,<sup>123</sup> as shown in a series of rough minutes recording the meeting between Strickland, Hardisty and Arthur Lupton. As a result of this meeting, James Rawson was 'disbarred, effective immediately' from officiating and ordered to hand all his records and account books to Lupton to be audited.<sup>124</sup> This letter from Henry Rawson was sent on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November – a meeting was held on the same day in response to the letter, recording the acceptance of James Rawson's resignation and that Lupton was to 'do everything needed' to appoint a new registrar as soon as possible.

Interestingly, Henry Rawson was appointed as an interim registrar, expected to handle to accounts and records. As he was not a religious leader, Henry was also instructed to provide 'suitable ministers' to officiate services in the meantime. That the committee did not wish to entirely sever James's ties to the company, perhaps in recognition of his good service, was an expression of faith in him. However, it may simply be that the committee recognised that James's role was hugely complex and important to the LGC: it would eventually take two men to replace him due to the sheer amount and variety of work he did in maintaining the cemetery.<sup>125</sup>

Minutes of a committee meeting held on the 29<sup>th</sup> of December stated that an Edward Brown has been appointed as the new chaplain and that Lupton would pay Strickland the sum of £100 'of the balance now due to Strickland'<sup>126</sup>, implying that James Rawson had indeed been incorrect in his recordkeeping, whether through inaccuracy or dishonesty. Following this meeting, Arthur Lupton resigned as Chairman, to be replaced by Edward Baines.

This incident offers a great deal of insight into the social role played by the cemetery in the wider community. All involved parties are in complete agreement that Rawson, as registrar

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<sup>123</sup> In his letter, Henry Rawson states that 'it is entirely false that [James] has been in the neighbourhood of Leeds these ten days past', suggesting that rumours are flying about James's whereabouts, and confirming the date of the accusations.

<sup>124</sup> Leeds General Cemetery Collection, Special Collections ,\_MS 421/1/2/20 item 4

<sup>125</sup> *ibid*

<sup>126</sup> *ibid*

was and should have been held in high moral regard, not just by the committee and shareholders but by the users of the cemetery. It is true that this emotive language may just have been representative of James Rawson's hugely emotional reaction to his being, in his eyes, falsely accused of misconduct, but it also spoke of a sense of disappointment.

Therefore, the cemetery is considered to be influential in the moral conduct of the local population, and Rawson's actions thus pose a risk to the users of the cemetery. The committee are keen to take strong and divisive action to protect its users and employees.

This concern for the health and wellbeing of the users was shown in a letter to the editor of the *Leeds Mercury* printed on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January, 1857. Its author asked the committee to find some way of heating the chapel and cited the 'sepulchral chill' as a risk to the health of those attending services there, citing friends who have suffered from 'colds and rheumatic attacks' following funerals at the LGC. The author closed by saying that, by using their means to invest in a way of heating the chapel, the shareholders would be sure to engender a feeling of gratitude in the general public, and signed off rather dramatically as 'ONE WHO HAS SUFFERED'. This represents two things. First, it shows that the relationship between the committee and the users of the cemetery was considered, at least by this author, to be a charitable one: the author hoped that the proprietors would see fit to 'take this friendly hint' and spend their funds improving the chapel. The author thought that the committee valued not just the custom, but the health of those who attend funerals. ONE WHO HAS SUFFERED was right to think so: in late 1857, the chapel underwent an extensive refitting, including the introduction of wood-burning stove, as well as measures to reduce the echo and new flooring.<sup>127</sup> The committee were keen to invest in the health and comfort of those who used the Leeds General Cemetery.

This is also shown through the committee's prompt response to accusations of allowing the LGC to fall into disrepair throughout the life of the LGC. In 1892, a letter was printed in the *Mercury* complaining that the LGC had 'become injurious to health as the burying grounds it

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<sup>127</sup> Fletcher, pg. 22

properly superseded'.<sup>128</sup> The committee immediately called in a health inspector and promptly printed a response that 'the health inspector found no faults except that a little more earth was needed between graves, and that has now been done'.<sup>129</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Within this essay, I have examined the factors behind both the changes in the status of the body and burial in Britain across the nineteenth century and the establishment of Leeds General Cemetery, with particular reference to the social role played by the cemetery to people of many different faiths, means and backgrounds.

Over the course of this research, it has become clear that the reports of men such as Robert Baker, G. A. Walker and Edwin Chadwick were influential in the changes that occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and may have impacted on the way in which the Leeds General Cemetery was run, as shown by the committee's insistence on certain features in the cemetery layout (drainage, high walls and distance from houses) and the changes made to the cemetery in 1857. However, these reports predate the initial formation of the cemetery, and so cannot have had an impact on the motivations of the committee in the years of establishing the LGC.

Consequently, whilst they were certainly part of the reason for the changes in burial provision in the nineteenth century overall, these reports and their subsequent examination of public health and burial cannot accurately be considered to be the watershed moments they are often presented as today. There is little evidence that the committee who formed the Leeds General Cemetery company were influenced by these reports or the following legislation.

Instead, the surviving reports, letters and other documentation show that those investing their time, money and energy in the development and running of the Leeds General

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<sup>128</sup> Leeds *Mercury*, 5<sup>th</sup> of December 1892. See also: Fletcher, pg. 35

<sup>129</sup> *ibid*

Cemetery had a variety of motivations amongst them: religious freedom, provision of burial for the poor and the improvement of Leeds.

The first report written by sub-committee to be distributed to all shareholders clearly places religious concerns front and centre. Further, it presented this religious concern as a philanthropic concern for all citizens regardless of religious affiliation. In the eyes of the LGC committee, it was a universal right of all citizens to bury the dead in respectful, peaceful manner without unnecessary suffering, cost or threats to public health.

The LGC's commitment to the right of burial for all in need of it is clear throughout its life: the careful collection of the details of the high prices of more expensive nearby cemeteries; the turning over of the garden specifically for the burial of the children of the poor; the Chairman's public defence of the 'godless' funerals its patrons were free to carry out in the Leeds General Cemetery.

Public health is a less transparently discussed subject in the records of the LGC. However, it was plainly a concern in the planning and design of the cemetery itself: keen and deliberate attention was paid to controlling the impact of the cemetery on local health. This is evident through the huge investment, both financial and emotional, in the matter of providing adequate drainage to prevent water contamination. Further, the committee's staunch rejection of building houses on the east to increase profits, their willingness to invest further funds in to the comfort and health of its users, regardless of class or status, their refusal to instigate fines on overrunning and rejection of the insidious incremental charges of other cemeteries all clearly point to a committee invested in providing burial for all regardless of means.

Of course, it would be foolish to dismiss the fact that taking good care of the health of patrons is also good business (although this perhaps takes on a different meaning when the business in question is a cemetery). Money and the opportunity to generate profit for shareholders was also motivating force for many who became involved, as shown by the

surviving letter fragments detailing a cemetery as the most profitable use of empty land outside of a quarry or a mine.

However, it remains evident that, particularly at its inception, civic pride and the cemetery as an outward display of 'public-spiritedness' were very central factors in drumming up initial support for the enterprise. This is clear from both 'Leodensian's letter initial letter in the *Mercury*, and from the other activities of the shareholders, such as George Goodman and the Lupton family.

Consequently, it seems that despite opening in 1833, the formation of the Leeds General Cemetery was primarily motivated by religious concerns and a desire to provide dignified burial for the poor. Clearly, the LGC falls more accurately into Rugg's first period of general cemeteries than the second.<sup>130</sup>

In these ways, the legislators and the shareholders had something in common. Both wanted better cemeteries, and for most of the members of each group, they wanted better cemeteries for reasons to do with social class and morality. Chadwick saw the poor condition of cemeteries as a threat to morality and social control through loss of piety, as a lack of interest and respect for death would breed hedonism. He hoped new cemeteries would allow the working classes space to reflect not on their loved ones, but on their own impending deaths, and thus hoped it would lead workers to behave in accordance with biblical principles in this life in the hope of entering Heaven in the next.

It seems obvious that many of the LGC shareholders also viewed their new, more attractive cemetery as a space for reflection, but it is clear from the first report, the pricing strategy and their defence of socialist and Dissenting funerals that, for them, this reflection was intended to extend respect to both the living and the dead, not just imbue the living with a horror of death. For Leeds General Cemetery committee, the key role of the cemetery was not one of

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<sup>130</sup> Rugg, (1998)

physical health but one of moral, mental and emotional health, and this belief is reflected at every level of its development.

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