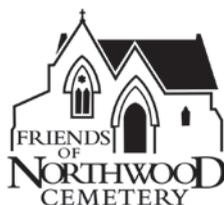


# NORTHWOOD CEMETERY

## HISTORY



# GUIDE MAP



# HISTORY

Before the Burial Acts of 1852 and 1853, the deceased were interred in church graveyards, but by the mid 19th Century it was apparent that they were becoming filled. The Burial Acts enabled the town officials to purchase and use land as cemeteries. A meeting to establish a Burial Board for Northwood Cemetery took place on 5th April 1855, chaired by Dr William Carter Hoffmeister. Four acres of land (10 plots) on the north-western side of Shamblers Copse, were purchased from the Ward estate. Ryde had been the first Island town to open a private cemetery, which came under Local Authority control in 1858, thereby making Northwood the very first municipal cemetery on the Island, having been laid out in 1856.



Early engraving of Northwood Cemetery entrance.

3



Boundary markers

4

Trees and shrubs were to be planted and flowerbeds positioned at the Cemetery's entrance. A bell was hung in the Church of England Chapel and stones were positioned to indicate the boundary of the Dissenters (Non-Church of England) section of the cemetery.

On 8th November 1856, the first burial took place. This 'honour' was bestowed upon James Cribb, a 32 year old local shoemaker who was interred in Grave 2600 of Plot 7.



James Cribb grave

By 1872 it was quite clear that more burial spaces would be required for the Dissenters of the Town and another piece of land on the western side was offered by Mr W. G. Ward. Within five years, two more acres of land to the south were purchased from the Ward Estate, plus a section of meadow owned by Mr Attrill to 'square' the cemetery off. The west wall was taken down and rebuilt along the new boundary and the north wall was extended to meet it (the wall adjacent to the Cowes Medical Centre today). The additional section, which added a further 13 plots comprising 4,484 grave spaces was levelled, seeded for grass, and new shrubs were planted, including 100 rhododendrons.

Twenty-four iron seats were purchased and installed around the Cemetery and by 1880, an area of outstanding beauty had, no doubt, been created. The Cemetery quickly became a popular venue for walks and even picnics; and at weekends a policeman patrolled the grounds to deter flower picking!

With the population of Cowes ever expanding in this most popular of yachting havens, more land was purchased in 1904, adding 10 more plots, thereby catering for an additional 5,044 grave spaces. The Cemetery now totalled an area of some 12 acres. Later in 1904 the Cemetery was extended again to the westward, and in 1933 negotiations with Mr Mullett, of Somerton Farm, were successful in purchasing a further four acres, expanding the Cemetery to its current footprint of 17 acres, making it the second largest cemetery on the Island, Mount Joy in Carisbrooke being the largest.

### NORTHWOOD CEMETERY IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Situated as it is between J. Samuel White's shipyard and Somerton airfield, it was almost inevitable that the Cemetery should suffer war damage. In the early hours of Tuesday 27th May 1941, four high explosive bombs were dropped into the southern outskirts of Cowes; two of them landed in the Cemetery causing considerable damage.

Headstones were uprooted and smashed, bones exposed, trees damaged, clay covered many graves, and both chapels and the dead house were damaged. It has been suggested that the glass-domed flower holders on the graves reflected moonlight back to the aircraft and these were mistaken for the skylights of the adjacent J. Samuel White's Somerton factory.

6



*Shrapnel damage*



7

*Iron railing piercing cedar tree branches*

The explosion catapulted a piece of graveside railing 40 feet up into the Cedar of Lebanon behind the East Chapel where it remains to this day. Directly below this railing is the base of the memorial to Anne Hewitt, which clearly bears the marks of shrapnel damage.

The most severe attack on the towns of Cowes and East Cowes occurred on the night of 4th/5th May 1942, killing 28 people in Cowes. With the sudden need to inter so many people, the local authority proposed that the victims should be buried in a communal grave at the Cemetery. A mass funeral took place on 12th May 1942, and a large Memorial Stone was erected after the war in their memory.



8

*Communal civilian war grave*

## THE FRIENDS OF NORTHWOOD CEMETERY

By 2008 much of the Cemetery had become overgrown and the West Chapel was becoming so unstable that the Isle of Wight Council planned to have it demolished.

In March 2008 The Friends of Northwood Cemetery was formed, with the long-term objective of restoring the Chapel and Mortuary buildings at the Cemetery's entrance back to their former Victorian splendour. The aims of the Friends were to restore the buildings, transcribe the burial records, survey flora and fauna, rediscover overgrown headstones and research the people interred in the Cemetery.

By early 2013 the East Chapel had undergone a significant 'make-over' to bring it back into use, thanks to Friends of Northwood Cemetery volunteers and generous donations over the previous three years. Windows had been either repaired or replaced, doors re-hung, a new floor laid, heating installed, outer walls re-pointed and sympathetic lighting added. The fruits of the Friends' labour were rewarded on 27th September 2013 when the Chapel was utilised for the first time in over 20 years for the funeral of Mrs Freda Sowerby.

## HERITAGE LOTTERY FUNDING PROJECT

During 2013 the Trustees Board focussed on the restoration the West Chapel, the original objective of the group in 2008. It applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and in July 2014 the HLF awarded the Friends of Northwood Cemetery, in partnership with the Isle of Wight Council (the landowners), a grant of £1.1m to restore the Twin Chapels, develop a Heritage Trail and create a Natural Burial Ground at the southern end of the Cemetery.

Following the very dry summer of 2013, significant structural movement of the East Chapel was detected, which forced its closure. Fortunately the cost of its restoration was agreed to be added to the original grant application. In June 2015, a revised application, increased to £1.6m to cover restoration of both chapels, was successful. The HLF were particularly excited at this 'community-led model'; the Friends of Northwood Cemetery (FoNC) taking the lead in a partnership with the Isle of Wight Council.

In 2017, the completion of the construction programme had created a Heritage Resource Centre and a functioning Chapel. Keeping the memorials clear of overgrowth will remain the duty of the Friends.

The Friends of Northwood Cemetery do hope you have enjoyed your stroll around this beautiful area and you are encouraged to visit again.

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[www.friendsofnorthwoodcemetery.org.uk](http://www.friendsofnorthwoodcemetery.org.uk)



**LOTTERY FUNDED**

