

A Short History of **Willow Grove Cemetery**



Willow Grove Cemetery, Reddish, Roman Catholic Chapel. A.Hughes 1957©

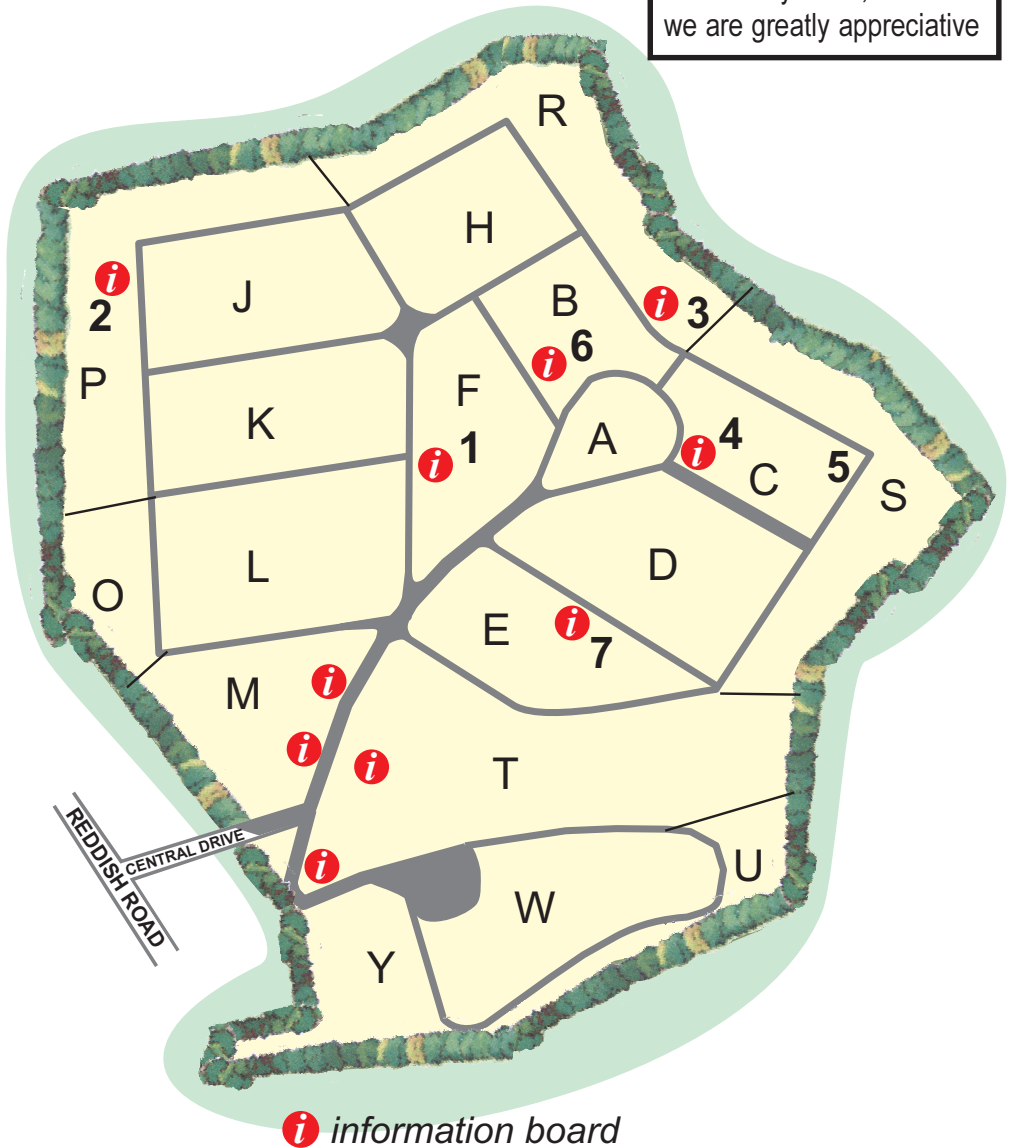
Compiled by members of Friends of Stockport Cemeteries

Text by Mike Hughes

Information sourced by Glennys Singleton, Mike Hughes & Sheila Robins

Map of Willow Grove Cemetery showing Burial Sectors

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The cover photograph of Willow Grove's Roman Catholic Chapel (1957) is reproduced with the kind permission of Mr. A Hughes.

A Short History of Willow Grove Cemetery

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This booklet is also available online at www.willowgrove.org.uk



WILLOW GROVE CEMETERY.—There are few, if any, Cemeteries in the North of England where finer views may be obtained on a clear day, or more chaste Memorials seen than at "Willow Grove," so freely visited at all seasons of the year. The monumental masonry designed and executed at the Cemetery Works (as may be seen by our illustration) is of a high order of merit.

Part 1

Introduction

A Short History of Willow Grove Cemetery gives a brief account of the history of the cemetery from its beginnings in 1877 until 2011. Relying on available documentary evidence the booklet recounts the growth and development of the cemetery from the purchase of the land in 1877 through the cemetery's initial popularity and its expansion, maturity and decline during the following century. A selection of notable burials is listed and the Imperial War Graves Commission record for the cemetery is given in full. The final part of the history concerns the more recent years of the cemetery and public efforts to halt proposals to abandon or to grass over the site. The history comes up to the present day through the story of the sustained local efforts to secure the recovery and preservation of the cemetery, successfully culminating in Stockport Council's ambitious and comprehensive Recovery and Development Plan of 2004.

The very useful leaflet *Willow Grove Cemetery – Discover a Hidden Treasure*⁽¹⁾ gives outline details of the lives of a selection of distinguished public figures whose memorial gravestones with their inscriptions can still be seen in the cemetery. This booklet tries to build on that foundation by giving some additional details where possible, and also adds accounts of the lives of a number of other people from various walks of life who are buried in the cemetery. There are also numerous paupers' graves, more recently known as public graves, where families were unable to pay for a funeral or to purchase a burial plot. Very few of these appear to have been marked with a headstone or memorial and in many cases, it seems, the graves may have been re-used for unrelated burials. The military graves that are maintained by the War Graves Commission in Willow Grove are also listed. Seen and taken together with the tributes to the more famous, the inscriptions on the gravestones of less celebrated people from the locality remind us that a cemetery reflects the history of its community through the lives of all the people who are buried there.

Part 2

The History of the Cemetery up to 1900

During the second half of the 19th century, Reddish was a rapidly expanding and largely working-class district of Stockport. The population figures almost doubled in 25 years, from 59,553 in 1881, to 99,646 in 1906. The following extract from *The Reddish Green History Trail* gives an impression of local living conditions during this period :

As Reddish became an urban area, the population grew at a phenomenal rate and the area was beset by a whole series of problems. The streets were thick in rubbish in summer and turned into quagmires by wagons and the rain in winter. Reddish was completely without a system of sewage treatment. Sewage was collected in pits or channelled into nearby rivers and streams. The Tame and especially the smaller streams, were choked and foul with sewage. Not surprisingly, public health was a major problem. Outbreaks of scarlet fever, measles and typhoid became common⁽²⁾.

Seen on maps of the time⁽³⁾, the district of Willow Grove was very different from the working-class districts of Reddish and was populated by prosperous citizens

occupying large private residences in extensive estates or grounds. These sometimes included cottages for servants as well as stables and coach-houses, and were well situated on high ground with fine open views eastwards. The 1851 census lists three cottages and Willow House on the site of the Willow Grove estate⁽⁴⁾. The owner at that time was Joseph Marsland, a coal merchant employing 18 labourers⁽⁵⁾. The house was occupied by the Marsland family made up of Joseph, his wife Anne, their daughter, three sons and two servants. Willow Grove House was one of the more substantial private houses in the area and continued to be occupied during the period of the cemetery's foundation.

Increases in the local population had made the need for a large local graveyard a practical necessity. The first firm plans for the establishment of a cemetery on the site of the estate were laid in August 1876, when 34 acres of land were purchased from Joseph Marsland for £14000 and the Willow Grove Cemetery Company was registered. The Stockport Advertiser reported the early proposals for a new cemetery as follows: *The New Reddish Cemetery - With a rapidly expanding population the places for interment became more limited in number, and the inconvenience of having to carry the remains of departed friends from as far away as Heaton Mersey were severely felt. Some time was spent in the selection of a suitable site. Several presented themselves in the district but both on the point of situation and price the Willow Grove estate seemed to be the most desirable. Not only did it present attractions in the natural beauty of the land, but in the eligibility of a considerable proportion of it for building purposes.* SA, Jan 12, 1877

The proposals for the cemetery offered a solution to a growing local problem but also presented attractive opportunities for local investment. The first meeting of shareholders of the proposed Willow Grove Cemetery Company in January 1877 was very well attended. The energy and drive behind the project are clear both from the excited tone of contemporary reports and also from the rapid progress of events in the first few months after the establishment of the cemetery company:

First Meeting of Shareholders

The first meeting of the Reddish, Heaton Norris and District Cemetery Company was held at the Warren Bulkeley Arms Hotel in Stockport on Tuesday last ...about 50 shareholders were present and about as many more were represented by proxy... and the Company is now the owner of the Willow Grove Estate as a freehold estate...and it would not only be a financial success for the shareholders, but the public would thank the company for taking the matter in hand, and meeting the requirements of the district without any tax upon the ratepayers."

SA, Jan 12, 1877

Land that had been purchased as part of the whole estate, and was too much for the purposes of the cemetery, was quickly identified as suitable for housing, and presented for sale. Within a month of the company purchasing the whole estate, part of it was up for sale again. The attractiveness of the proposition continued to strengthen, and in a week a second issue of shares was announced. Within the year, the cemetery had been planned, laid out, the plots marked off, excess land disposed of at a profit,

and an opening ceremony had taken place:

The Reddish Cemetery - Opening Ceremonial.

The new cemetery in the Willow Grove Estate was formally opened on Saturday afternoon. The land was surveyed...apportioning it out into graves...a plan for 15931, of which 6591 are to be on the Church of England portion, 6512 on the Nonconformist portion, and 6243 on the Roman Catholic ground, leaving room for 185 unappropriated. Chapels in the Old English Gothic style after drawings by Mr. Hunt, architect, of Stockport, are to be erected. For Church of England and Nonconformist uses the chapels will be semi-detached, with entrances at different ends. These will not only be commodious, but artistic, and will be ornamented by a tall and graceful spire, the cost of the double erection being estimated at £2000. The Roman Catholics are to have a separate chapel built at an expense of £1000."

SA, Nov 16, 1877

The records show that Willow Grove cemetery held an important place in the affections of the local community for almost a century following these promising beginnings. The leading local newspaper of the time described the cemetery as follows in the obituary notice for Mr John Clarke, the first registrar of the cemetery who died in 1916: *Willow Grove Cemetery is recognised as one of the best laid out and most beautiful burial grounds in the North of England. The Cemetery was a monument to Mr. Clarke's work, and the best monument that could be erected to him. The cemetery was not only Mr Clarke's life work, but it was his hobby, and his labours had most fruitful results. He had received the highest form of flattery in that many of his designs were imitated and copied in other cemeteries.*

SA, 23 Oct, 1916

Part 3

Burials in Willow Grove Cemetery: Local Notables and others

Over 35,000 people are buried in Willow Grove and they include a great many families from the immediate district covering a wide social range. There are also interesting historical and social variations with a good many paupers' graves, memorials to some travelling families, and a number of local dignitaries. The following selection includes brief outlines in date order of some of their memorials, and in certain cases the circumstances of their deaths. A complete list of burials at Willow Grove is available in the local authority records department⁽⁶⁾. The outline map on the inside front cover⁽⁷⁾ shows the plan of the cemetery and will help in locating the graves described in this part of the history.

Frederick Whittaker Scott 1843-1903 (cemetery section F).

F.W. Scott lived at Southcliffe, Reddish, with his wife, two sons and two daughters, and was the proprietor of a substantial specialist engineering works and thus a prosperous local employer. His company, the Atlas Steel Rope Works, Reddish, manufactured steel ropes and haulage systems for a world-wide clientele in mining engineering, with installations in South America, South Africa, the whole of Europe, and the United Kingdom. An undated extract from a company catalogue in the late 19th century reads⁽⁸⁾:

It is with great pleasure I now introduce to my numerous friends this revised and

extended edition of my Catalogue, and I trust they will find it useful and interesting, more especially those who are users of Steel Ropes for mining and mechanical purposes, to whom I think it will be most serviceable. The great increase in my business has necessitated the putting down of additional Workshops and Machinery to enable me to supply a demand for my make of Rope, they now being employed at the principal mines in Great Britain and all over the world where wire ropes are used. The Frederick Whittaker Scott Playing Fields at the Whitehill Estate in South Reddish, nowadays a popular football ground and training field, are another lasting memorial to this local notable.

James Gaskell 1869-1906 (cemetery section F)

James Gaskell was a local hero who lost his life while saving a young girl from being run over by a tramcar. In saving the child he was struck by the tram and killed. James Gaskell worked as a felt hat finisher and the records show that he lived at 33 Hill Street, Portwood five years before he died. Sadly it seems that he had lost a very young daughter of his own some years before his own fatal accident. He had two sons who would have been 12 and 9 when James died. James' younger daughter Florrie must have died soon after her birth since her first birthday is not recorded. James' wife was still living at the same address in 1912 with her sons and her father in law. The memorial to James Gaskell reads as follows:

James Gaskell, aged 37 years, who lost his life whilst saving a child from being run over by an electric tramcar on Great Portwood Street, on April 11th, 1906. This stone was erected by public subscription in admiration of the act of heroism and true brotherhood.

William Henry Chadwick 1829-1908 (cemetery section E).

Among the most distinguished memorials in the older part of the cemetery is the monument dedicated to William Chadwick. Sometimes known as "the Old Chartist" William Chadwick was an active figure in the early Trades Union movement and was imprisoned for six months in 1848 for his role in the Ashton-under-Lyne Rising. Also a Wesleyan preacher, William Chadwick assisted the cotton co-operatives in their early efforts to raise wages and helped agricultural workers in forming a union under Joseph Arch. William Chadwick spent much of his life fighting for people's rights. His funeral was reported as follows:

The funeral of the late Mr William H Chadwick, one of the few remaining Chartists, took place at Willow Grove cemetery on Monday, in the presence of a number of relatives, friends and representatives from various political organisations in the district. After a strenuous life in which the old Chartist had taken part in many political battles, it was a singular coincidence that his remains should have been laid to rest in a severe thunderstorm. But so it was; rain fell in torrents accompanied by vivid flashes of lightning and loud peals of thunder as the mourners stood around the grave.

SA June 5, 1908.

Joseph Higginson 1832-1910 (cemetery section W)

Best known to the local community as the benefactor of St. Joseph's RC School, Higginson Road, Reddish, Joseph Higginson was born in Tyldesley near Leigh in

Lancashire and became a successful businessman and devout churchgoer. He went to work early in his life for mill owner Thomas Houldsworth of Newton Street, Manchester. In 1867, he was appointed manager of the new Reddish Mill, in what is now Houldsworth Street, by Sir William Houldsworth. When the mill was taken over by the Fine Spinners Combine, Joseph was made a director of the company. Joseph lived in a large double-fronted house at one end of the Reddish Mill. He was a member of the Liberal Party and the School Attendance Board, and was also President of Houldsworth Working Men's Club. In 1881 Joseph offered the sum of £5000 towards the expense of a proposed Roman Catholic Church in Reddish. The foundations of the church were initiated by Bishop Vaughan, Bishop of Salford, and Joseph Higginson, and the foundation stone was laid on March 25th 1882 while the church was finally consecrated on December 29th, 1882. Joseph died in 1910, and although at the time he lived in Southport, he chose to be buried in Willow Grove Cemetery. In the cemetery there is a family plot with three monuments to Joseph and members of his family. Joseph left the sum of £50,000 in his will, and £500 in a trust administered by the Bishop to be used by the parish priest for mission work. St Joseph's RC school was opened on January 28th, 1883 as a result of the legacy from Joseph, and was called the 'Joseph Higginson Memorial School', with room for 220 children. In 1910 building for a bigger school was commenced, opening in 1913 on land given by Sir William Houldsworth, in memory of Joseph Higginson. Sir William also gave money for St. Elisabeth's C. of E. Church in Reddish, as well as funding for housing, and is regarded as a generous benefactor to the people of Reddish⁽⁹⁾.

Frederick Rawlings 1836-1914 (cemetery section C)

Frederick Rawlings lived with his family in Willow Grove House, a large residence which stood in grounds forming part of the early Willow Grove Estate. Describing himself as "a Town Missionary" in 1871, then later "a Herbalist" in 1881, and finally an "Electric Practitioner" in 1901, Frederick Rawlings seems to have operated as a medical advisor of sorts for some years in the area. Frederick Rawlings and his wife and family were involved in the notorious Penistone Railway Accident of 1884 in which twenty four passengers were killed. All four of the Rawlings family were injured and Mrs Rawlings lost her life as a result of the accident.

On 16th July, 1884 Mr and Mrs Rawlings with their sons and daughter were travelling by train to Grimsby and intended that same evening to sail for Brussels where they were hoping to spend a few weeks holiday. As the train passed the signal box at Bullhouse Bridge near Penistone one of the axles snapped. The train was reportedly travelling at about 50 miles per hour. As it reached the bridge three of the carriages crashed through the parapet and fell to the roadway below while the remainder of the carriages fell down the embankment. All four were injured but Mrs Rawling's injuries proved fatal and she died soon after she was admitted to hospital.

SA July 18, 1884.

John Clarke 1852-1916 (cemetery section B)

The first registrar at Willow Grove, occupying the office from 1876 to 1916, and a highly valued advisor to the cemetery board for forty years. John Clarke designed many of the memorials in the cemetery and his styles were much imitated by other

cemeteries. His funeral was reported as follows:

...at the conclusion of the service at the graveside, Mr S Ralphs said that he wished to express on behalf of the directors of the cemetery company, their sense of the loss they had sustained by the death of Mr Clarke, and also to express sympathy with Mrs Clarke and family. They had the greatest confidence in Mr Clarke's judgement and invariably followed his advice. The Cemetery was a monument to Mr Clarke's work and the best monument that could be erected to him. When Mr Clarke went there nearly forty years ago there was nothing but paths laid out. There was scarcely a tree or a shrub and with the exception of a few forest trees, he had planned the whole of them. He also designed most of the stones and he was responsible for many of the monuments which were to be seen around them. The cemetery was not only Mr Clarke's life work, but it was his hobby and his labours had had fruitful results, and he had received the highest form of flattery in that many of his designs were imitated and copied in other cemeteries in other parts of the country. SA 13 October, 1916

Sir Thomas Thornhill Shann 1846-1923 (cemetery section S)

Born in Ancoats, Manchester into humble circumstances, Sir Thomas founded his own business at the age of 22 and rose to become an influential industrialist and Mayor of Manchester. A local resident, he was responsible for creating Heaton Moor Park which today remains intact as originally planned, with the many trees planted in the early days now in full maturity. Recognised in commerce and public office for his tact, good humour, and sound practical sense he brought about the settlement of many disputes in the cotton industry and as Chairman of the Manchester Licensing Bench. He held office as Chairman of the Manchester Industrial Schools for thirty years, was trustee and treasurer of the John Rylands Library and Governor of Manchester University. He worked as a visiting Justice to Strangeways Prison and was a leading Freemason, his distinctions including that of Grand Senior Deacon of Masons of England. One of his obituaries said of him: *He was of a breed of men who have made Lancashire the most famous county in England. Starting his life with the advantage of a clear head and a sound constitution he needed no outside help. The many obstacles of a poor boy, he realised, were there to be overcome and one after another he overcame them. At all times he was kind and unaffected, never pretending to be what he was not.* Obituary, Willow Grove Heritage Trail

Susannah Bogg 1855-1924 (cemetery section C)

Perhaps ironically the most imposing monument in the cemetery is that to Susannah Bogg about whom we know little, although research is ongoing. Susannah's father is known to have been a piano dealer in Levenshulme, and she lived at "Rose Villa", Napier Road, Heaton Moor, but little more is known. Her monument is now in the process of restoration through the efforts of the Friends of Stockport Cemeteries.

The Baker Family 1928 (cemetery section R no 11707A)

Gas poisoning Tragedy in Stockport.

On the morning of Friday Nov 30, 1928, a whole family of six persons resident at No 71, Sheffield Street, Heaton Norris, one of a row of working-class houses, the thoroughfare running parallel with Lancashire Hill from Wharf Street to Gordin Street,

were found dead in their two bedrooms, poisoned by gas which had escaped from a fractured 2inch gas main laid beneath the footpath along the front of the houses. The family consisted of Arthur Horace Baker, 36, his wife Ethel, 34, and their four children, James William, 12, Dorothy, 7, Harold, 4, and Olive 22 months. The photograph (printed in the original article) shows the three motor hearses in which the coffins and flowers were conveyed to Willow Grove Cemetery, on Monday afternoon, Dec 3rd, the funeral attracting thousands of sympathetic spectators. SE Annual 1928-30

Paupers' (or public) graves

These graves, most of which seem to be in Sections O and P of the cemetery, contain the remains of people whose families were unable to afford the cost of a funeral and who were buried at public expense. Each grave accommodated people from different families and backgrounds some of whom may have had no known relations. The records give revealing information about these people, many of whom were young children, or show what little was known about their parents and their occupations, or even where they found. They give especially revealing glimpses of the frequently brief life-expectancy of children. The following individual grave records give a small selection of the many thousands of individuals buried in paupers' or public graves in the cemetery. The records are reproduced verbatim.

Plot O 87816. 3 Adults 2 Children

William Critchlow	79. Millwright, 117 Old Rd, Heaton Norris.	15/05/1880
Margaret Hall	69. widow, 193 Old Rd, Heaton Norris.	25/05/1880
William Dodgson	4 mths. Son of Ann, 150 Old Rd, Heaton Norris.	23/06/1880
James Mottram.	26. Cotton spinner, 58 Manchester St, Reddish.	05/08/1880
Lucy Harriet	2 years. 5 Chadwick Yard, Lancashire Hill.	02/11/1880

Plot O 87811 2 Adults 5 Children

George Hibbert.	57. Labourer. 11 Birch Street. Heaton Norris.	02/06/1880
James Shannon.	10days. 18 Thomas Street,	12/06/1880
Elizabeth Emma Pimblott.	1 yr. Fr. Peter, Thompson St, L'hulme,	14/06/1880
William Hoskins.	56. 3, Short St. Heaton Norris,	21/06/1880
Tom Vaughan Powell.	5 mths. Son of Thomas, Station View, L/shlme,	21/06/1880
Martha Hodgekinson.	2yrs. Fr. William. 52 Manchester St, Reddish.	22/06/1880
Florence Garner.	1 mth. Daughter of John. 55 Park Lane	27/06/1880

Plot O 8770. 4 Children

Lily Taylor.	9mths. Dau. of Joseph. 523 Gorton Rd, Reddish.	17/04/1883
Beatrice Davi	4mths. Dau. Of Robert 4 Lees Court, Gorton	21/04/1883
Florence Pickering	3mths. Dau. of William, Sand Fold, Reddish	03/05/1883
Sarah Ann Cooper	12hrs. Dau. of Alfred Bateson Court, Canal St.	08/05/1883

Plot O 8768 6 Adults 9 Children

Sarah Maine	70. 16 Hesketh Street.	27/01/1883
Joseph Hall.	45. Plumber. 193 Old Rd. Heaton Norris	28/01/1883
Mary Alice Mullin.	10mth. 113 Broadstone Rd. Reddish	03/02/1883
Ann Mitchell.	53. Wife of Mark, Withington Workhouse	05/02/1883
Mary Whiley	18hr. Dau of Joseph, Hawthorn Terrace	06/02/1883
Lily Newton	8wks. Dau of James, Stockport Rd	15/02/1883

John Elliot.	27. Labourer, Broom Lane	24/02/1883
Richard Dickins.	6yrs. Son of Thomas. 25 Hesketh Street	27/02/1883
Elizabeth Dean.	47. Wife of John. 11 Ann Street. Reddish	11/03/1883
Rubinia Harrison.	4mths. Daughter of Samuel. 123 Love Lane	13/03/1883
Emily Shaw.	3yrs. Daughter of William. 24 Frances Street.	15/03/1883
Annie Davis.	Infant. Daughter of Alfred. 11 Albert Street	23/03/1883
Sarah Ann Johnson.	1yr. Daughter of Jane. 32 Priory Lane	28/03/1883
Sarah Ann Burton.	7wks. 30 Frances Street.	29/03/1883
Mary Booth.	50. Widow, 3 Schofield St,	31/03/1883

Plot O 8615 1 Adult 5 Children

Robert Barnett.	2mths. Twin sons 28 Church St, Heaton Norris	24/05/1883
Thomas Barnett.	2mths. of Thomas 28 Church St, Heaton Norris	24/05/1883
John Hallam.	73. Labourer 10 Priory Lane.	30/05/1883
George Wright Manah.	Infant Son of George. 53 Booth St, Reddish	31/05/1883
Arthur Saxton.	1 yr. 27 Old Road.	05/06/1883
Ercy Bright	9 mths. Son of John, 12 High Union Street.	06/06/1883

Plot O 8769. 13 Adults.

Sarah Shelmidine.	66. Wife of James, 10 Coronation St.	29/03/1883
James Smithaman	44. Clerk. 99 Hesketh St.	02/04/1883
John Jackson.	61. Labourer. 25 Frances St.	05/04/1883
Martha Davis Brown	56. 11 Henry St.	11/04/1883
Elizabeth Walker.	33. Wife of John. 85 Hesketh St.	04/06/1883
George Wood.	71. Labourer. 1 Chadwick Yard.	03/06/1883
William Long.	50. Labourer. Stockport Union.	12/05/1883
William Hough.	75. Labourer. 5 Heath St.	14/06/1883
Caroline Morris.	? Wife of John, 9 Hope St.	20/06/1883
Caroline Stafford.	57. Wife of Charles, 10 Weston St.	27/06/1883
Sarah Jane Dyer.	27. Widow. 8 Longson St.	01/07/1883
Harry Blackburn.	29. Bricksetter. Stockport Infirmary.	14/07/1883
A Woman Found Unknown in Reddish		24/07/1883

Plot O9696 Beeley Family - 35 Hesketh Street.

Geoffrey	born 1894 died 1895	
Ethel	born 1894 died 1896	
Florrie	10 May 1902.	3mths. O 9696.
Emily	14 March 1903.	3mths. O 9603.
Mary	20 August 1904.	2mths. P 9458.
Harry	29 Aug 1908.	6mths. P —.
Alice	30 March 1910	3 months P —
John	26 Sept 1911.	12mths. O 9193.
Emma	02 Oct 1913.	3mths. P —.
Emma	nee Siddall,	aged 42

Elizabeth, aged 19; George, aged 18; Elsie, aged 14; Robert, aged 12.

Although these children belonged to one family they seem to have been buried in separate graves. The 1911 census shows the parents to have been married for 19 years. They had 13 children of whom 9 had died. James Edward Beeley, aged 42, is recorded as a Carter in the coal trade.

Plot O 914

SHEEHAN. 43 Short Street.

David	19 Dec 1903.	9mths	O 9417.
George	10 Aug 1904.	3yrs.	O 9147.
Ellen	14 Aug 1905.	11mths.	O 9146.
Thomas	11 Sept 1906.	8mths.	O —.
David	27 Jul 1914.	3mths.	O —.
Ellen	06 Jan 1920.	22mths.	J 4818.
Gladys	13 Mch 1924.	4yrs.	J 4818.

The last two infants to die were buried in their own grave purchased by the family. The other children were buried in paupers' graves.

Plot O 08371

BENNETT.	19 James Street.	Isolation hospital	
Maggie.	05 March 1903.	14yrs	O 8371.
Lizzie.	11 March 1903.	11yrs.	O 8371.
Robert.	31 October 1903.	42 yrs.	O 8371.

The Friends of Stockport Cemeteries are keen to collect verbatim accounts drawn from family histories or other surviving sources that might provide little known facts about the cemetery. Here is one such account illustrating the untimely deaths of childhood members of the same family who were buried in paupers' graves in Willow Grove.

Harry Lane, Plot O 9193

Harry Lane was 5 years old. He went out playing with his older siblings William 9 yrs, Walter 8 yrs and their friends. They were not allowed to go near the canal but as youngsters do they went to the canal side and unfortunately young Harry fell in. He was pulled to safety but he was wet through to the skin. Frightened by what their parents might say William and Walter kept Harry away from home until his clothes had dried out. This was in the January weather. Harry contracted pneumonia and died nine days later. As there was no money to bury him Harry was buried in a paupers' grave in January, 1912, plot no O 9193.

Sarah Ann Lane was Harry's mother. Sarah, who was 41 years old, had been ill with influenza and was confined to bed upstairs by her doctor. In those days before central heating, the only heat was from open fires. Sarah had a fire lit in the small grate in her bedroom to help keep her warm. It appears Sarah feeling a little better got up from her bed in the middle of the morning and stood beside the open fire. Her nightdress caught fire and in flames she ran downstairs and out into the street. Her eldest son who had come home from the night shift ran after her with a hearth rug and tried to wrap her in the rug but she kept throwing it off. When she was finally taken to the infirmary she was badly burned. She died a few days later. Sadly she had been expecting a baby and that child too died as a result of the tragedy. Sarah was buried in a Paupers grave at Willow Grove in April 1924, plot no O 9834.

Walter Lane was Harry's Dad and Sarah's husband and had fought in the First World War. He was on active service in France and experienced a Mustard Gas attack. He was lucky not to have died as it was quite a nasty experience. A lot of his comrades died in that attack. After the war he served his time until he finally left the army in 1919. Walter was a sickly man, and died young at the age of 52 in 1935. The mustard gas

must have had a serious effect on his lungs, resulting in aggravated Tuberculosis. Rather than being buried in a pauper's grave Walter was buried in his brother's family grave, P 9131. *(These accounts appear with the kind permission of Glennys Singleton, from her Family History).*

Ethel Robinson (nee Magee) 1921-1940 (S 12788)

Ethel Robinson was 19 years old in 1940 when her husband of only six months, James Robinson, shot and killed her. James was at home on military sick leave and should have returned to his regiment. Instead the two made a suicide pact but after shooting his wife James was unable to kill himself. The inquest report noted that even though the jury found him guilty they added a strong recommendation for mercy and the Home Secretary ultimately recommended his reprieve.

Phoenix Boswell - Better known as "Buller" 1918-1963 (section D)

The Boswells were a well-known local family of travellers who settled for some time in Heaton Norris in the later decades of the 19th century. There are two further Boswell graves in Willow Grove in Section U where further memorials to the same family dating back to 1918 can be found. The family was well known for the distinctive names given to its daughters. The names given to earlier members of the family in each generation are very unusual and interesting, and include Theophilus Boswell (d 1918), an earlier Phoenix Boswell (d 1942) and the daughters Nation Boswell (d 10 Jan 1917 aged 14) Miliander Haddock (christened 11 Sept 1887), and Plantcelia Boswell (christened 19 April, 1885), both christened at Christ Church, Heaton Norris. Some of the family occupations listed in the census returns of 1891 include: Noah Boswell "Maker of clothes pegs; hawker and cane chair seater", Clara Boswell "Hawker of pegs and laces", and Dona Boswell "Cotton doffer". Family members return to Willow Grove periodically to visit the plots and to tend the graves. The Boswell family has long traditions and further information can be found about them at the website: www.romanygenes.webeden.co.uk

Vilma Dawn Beech 1932-1939 (section J 4562)

This child was killed outside her home in Garner's Lane by a motor car. The following newspaper account of the subsequent court hearing gives a revealing fragment of social history and the conditions of life of the time:

Cash Value of Life.

Liability was admitted in a case in which Marie Beech, Garners Lane, Stockport, claimed damages for the loss of expectation of the life of her daughter, Vilma Dawn Beech, aged six and a half years old. who was fatally injured on Nov 10th 1939 by a car belonging to Mrs Elizabeth Martin Chatterton, Oaklands Ave, Stockport. Mr H Burton (instructed by Samuel Bitcher and Bitcher) represented the plaintiff while the defendant was represented by Mr A D Gerrard. (instructed by Wood Lord and Co.) The Judge said he always considered a jury was in just as good a position as a judge to decide on the value of a child's life. He had never known, he did not know, he never would know and he did not think anyone could arrive at a figure with accuracy. He awarded the mother £350 in addition to £12 funeral expenses costs.

Manchester Guardian March 13, 1940

Part 4

War Graves from Both Conflicts in Willow Grove Cemetery

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission describes Willow Grove Cemetery as follows:

This cemetery is located at South Reddish, on the Stockport-Reddish Road. There are graves from both World Wars in the cemetery. A War Cross is erected and there is also a Screen Wall bearing names of those whose graves are not marked by headstones. All the burials in Brunswick Methodist Church Burial Ground are now named on the Screen Wall in this cemetery. Number of identified casualties: 144.

Joseph Lister VC 1886-1963 (section P).

Born in Salford and moving to Reddish after his marriage, Joseph enlisted in the Lancashire Fusiliers in 1916. He was awarded the Victoria cross in 1917, when the following notice duly appeared in the London Gazette:

No 8133, Sergt. Joseph Lister, 1st Battalion "For most conspicuous bravery in attack". When advancing to the first objective his company came under machine-gun fire from the direction of two "pill-boxes". Seeing that the galling fire would hold up our advance and prevent our troops keeping up with the barrage, Sergeant Lister dashed ahead of his men and found a machine-gun firing from a shell-hole in front of the "pill-box". He shot two of the enemy gunners and the remainder surrendered to him. He then went to the "pill-box" and shouted to the occupants to surrender. They did so with the exception of one man who Sergeant Lister shot dead; wheron about one hundred of the enemy emerged from shell holes farther to the rear and surrendered. This non-commissioned officer's prompt act of courage enabled our line to advance without hardly a check and to keep up with the barrage, the loss of which might have jeopardised the whole course of the local battle".

In a letter to his wife he wrote: "... so you see I have done my bit, and will do it again". Joseph Lister also received the Belgian Militaire medal, the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. After the war he became a postman in Reddish, and later a watchman at Craven's Engineering Company.

He lived at 25, David Street, Reddish, and was a life member of Reddish Working Men's Club. After his retirement Joseph Lister continued to work as a school-crossing warden in Reddish.

War Graves in Willow Grove ⁽¹⁰⁾

Name-	No	-Rank-	Service-	Regiment-	Date Of Death-	Age-	Grave/Memorial Ref.
1	ADSHEAD, ELLIS, E	-Gunner	-294466-Royal Garrison Artillery-	14/12/1918-24	-Screen Wall.		
2	ALDRED, J	-Sapper	-WR/100186-Royal Engineers-	01/07/1921-Unknown	-J. 4870.		
3	ALLEN, ROBERT, R	-Private	-13410-Cheshire Regiment-	31/07/1917-37	-Screen Wall. War plot.		
4	ARCHER, T	-Private	-8084-Manchester Regiment-	19/01/1918-Unknown	-P. 10331.		
5	ASHWORTH, H	-Sergeant	-790011-Canadian Railway Troops-	30/08/1917-Unknown	-H. 3519.		
6	BARTON, A	-Serjeant	-20727-East Lancashire Regiment-	17/12/1916-Unknown	-Screen Wall.		
7	BEELEY, WILLIAM, W	-Sergeant	(W.Op./Air Gnr. -1379951-RAF V. Res-	18/08/1942-21	- J. 4916.		
8	BENNETT, HARRY, H	-Lance Corporal	-18800-Manchester Regiment-	09/10/1919-21	-J. 4759.		

9 BETTS, J -Private -15294-Hampshire Regiment-03/09/1915-Unknown -Screen Wall. War plot.
 10 BLACKBURN, H G -Private -81578-The King's (L'pool Regiment)-29/09/1918-Unknown -P. 9879.
 11 BOOTH, W -Private -305940-The King's (L'pool Reg.)-14/12/1920- Unknown -Scr. Wall. E. 2653.
 12 BOSWELL, ERNEST E, Lance Corp -102543- King's (L'pool Reg)-18/11/1920 -Scr'n Wall.
 13 BOTHAM, GEORGE WILLIAM, -Com QM Serj -16464-Royal Def. Cps-14/06/1917-49 -S.12705.
 14 BOWER, C -Private -40553-Worcestershire Regiment-03/10/1917-20 -H. 3500.
 15 BRADBURY, W A -Private -203113-Border Regiment-31/03/1920-Unknown -Screen Wall.
 16 BRIDGE, A M -Sapper - 48741-Royal Engineers-11/10/1918-Unknown -J. 4758.
 17 BRUCE, JOHN EDWIN, J E -Private -64406-Cheshire Regiment-17/09/1918-24 -Screen Wall.
 18 BRYAN, P -Private -S/23219-Seaforth Highlanders-27/06/1918-Unknown -Screen Wall
 19 BUNTING, JOHN (JACK), -Serg -612024-Royal Air Force-25/03/1944-24 -Sec. W. Grave 15782.
 20 BURGESS, ARTHUR,-Private -30103-The Loyal N. Lancs Reg-27/02/1919-32 -Screen Wall.
 21 CADMAN, HORACE, Private – 72826 – Machine gun Corps (Infantry) 12/02/1918 J4753
 22 CASSON, T, Sec. Lieut. Cheshire Regiment, 17/05/1917. Unknown. S 12626
 23 CHENNELL, J.L. Private – 33108 – Lincolnshire regiment – 23/09/1917 – Unknown - Screen Wall
 24 CLARKE, A – Pioneer – 303935 – Royal Engineers – 23/03/1918 –26 - J. 4774.
 25 COCKER, W – Private – 86234 – Cheshire Regiment – 11/03/1920 – 17 – J4236.
 26 COLLIER, STANLEY – Private 4140 – Cheshire Regiment – 16/01/1917 – 20 – L. 6036
 27 COOPER, G A, Pr. G/6156 – Queens's (Royal W. Surrey Reg – 07/11/1918 – 23 – Screen Wall
 28 CORK, WILLIAM HERBERT, Private – 817580 – Cheshire Regt – 24/09/1939 - 25 – V.13898
 29 COTTON, DANIEL, - Private – S/17769 – Seaforth highlanders – 19/05/1917 – Screen Wall
 30 COX, J. Private, 167955, Royal Engineers, 8 Feb 1922, J4870. In same grave as Aldred.
 31 CRAIG, SYDNEY, - Lance Corporal – 17862 – Manchedster Regiment – 09/07/1916 – 24 – J.4662
 32 CRAIG, DAVID WILLIAM, - Private – 154672 – Pioneer Corps – 24/02/1945 – 35 – W. 14972
 33 CREES, S - Sapper – Deal/946(S) – Royal MarineS – 20/02/1915 – 24 – F. 3201
 34 CROALL, WILLIAM TAIT – Sergeant (W.Op./Air Gnr.) – 1304723 – RALVR – 19/08/42 – K.5431
 35 CROSSLEY, W.H.C. – Private – G/74312 – Royal Fusiliers – 18/11/1918 – 21 – Screen Wall
 36 CROSTHWAITE, A – Private –12534 – Royal Welsh Fusilier – 04/03/1918 – Unknown – K. 5058
 37 DALE, ARTHUR, -Corporal (Air Gnr. U/T) -1357361-RAF V Res-23/04/1942-31 -Sec. J. 4752.
 38 DEAN, JOHN WILLIAM, J W -Private -25022-Cheshire Regiment-27/10/1919-36 -C. 914
 39 DUNN, G H -Private -6754-Manchester Regiment-02/11/1918-Unknown -Screen Wall. War plot.
 40 DYSON, JAMES FREDERICK, J F -Private -4/78346-Welsh Regiment-15/10/1918-18 -J. 4769.
 41 ECCLES, WILLIAM, W -Private -49763-Manchester Regiment-19/11/1918-27 -D. 1537.
 42 ELWELL, JAMES HENRY, J H -Pioneer -WR/21724-R. EngS-24/08/1918-Unknown -U. 13750.
 43 EVANS, EVAN, E - Private - 3250-Manchester Regiment-19/12/1918-35 - P.10019.
 44 EVANS, WILLIAM EDWARD, –Serj. -2608448-RA Med Corps-29/04/1941 -Sec. W. Grave 15409.
 45 FAY, JOHN, J -Airman 2nd Class -42097-Royal Flying Corps-14/09/1917-39 -J. 4749.
 46 FINDLOW, ARTHUR, A -Driver -T2/9924-Army Service Corps-15/05/1917-23 -J. 4711.
 47 FLETCHER , W -Private -S/18630-Cameron Highlanders-28/09/1916-33 -Screen Wall. War plot.
 48 FORSHAW, JOHN THOMAS-Airman 3rd Class -51604- Royal F. Corps-04/02/1917-40 -T. 15924.
 49 GARDNER, JOHN, J -Sapper -2143538-Royal Engineers-07/06/1941-33 -Sec. P. Grave 8703.
 50 GILBERT, FREDERICK MAURICE, F M -Priv -4432- Buffs (E. Kent Reg)-08/02/1917 –S. Wall.
 51 GILFOYLE, W -Private -9623-Royal Army Medical Corps-01/11/1917-Unknown -R. 11942.
 52 GLYNN, PETER, P -Private -23637-Royal Scots Fusiliers-01/03/1918-37 -Screen Wall. War plot.
 53 GRANVILLE, GEORGE ALBERT, G A -Private -6303-Essex Reg. -23/12/1917-21 -Screen Wall.
 54 GREAVES, HARRY, H -Private -97002144-Non Combat Corps-11/01/1942-26 -Sec. X. 13302.

55 GRECIAN, F.-Eng Rm Artif. 4th Class -C/MX660266-RN-25/09/1945-Unknown -Sec P. 10463.
56 HALL, G A -Private -13730-Manchester Regiment-04/06/1915-35 -E. 2237.
57 HAMPSON, NORMAN B, -Private -3661289-S. Lancs Reg-26/11/1940 -Sec. W. Grave 1 5402.
58 HARDIE, GEOFFREY,-Flying Off. Pilot -156938-RAF Vol Res-10/04/1944-22 -Sec. D. 1467A.
59 HARRIS, W -Private -11263-Cheshire Regiment-29/01/1918-Unknown -Screen Wall. War plot.
60 HATTON, THOMAS, T -Corporal -711483-Royal Field Artillery-27/03/1920-40 -J. C.E. 4840.
61 HAWCROFT, DENNIS, D -Bombardier -4747194-Royal Artillery-03/03/1947-26 -Sec. K. 5551.
62 HILL, J W -Private -52624-Manchester Regiment-20/03/1918-Unknown -D.1489.
63 HINDLEY, AARON, A -Lieutenant - -Royal Air Force-19/05/1918-19 -B. 262.
64 HOLLAND, I -Pioneer -280579-Royal Engineers-16/08/1918-Unknown -J. 4780.
65 HOLLIDAY, MAURICE R, -Private -19767-Manchester Regiment-06/12/1916-Unknown -F. 3073.
66 HORROCKS, JOHN, J -Rifleman -R/5862-King's Royal Rifle Corps-02/03/1916-20 -J. 4609.
67 IRVING, WILLIAM CLIFFORD, W C -Private -290705-Welsh Regiment-02/12/1917-20 -K. 5083.
68 JARVIS, E -Private -20689-Royal Army Veterinary Corps-14/09/1920-Unknown -Screen Wall.
69 JEPSON, HARRY, H -Pioneer -171727-Royal Engineers-02/02/1917-26 -J. 4151.
70 JOHNSON, H -Private -32930-South Lancashire Regiment-13/11/1918-Unknown
71 KIRK, JOSEPH LINGARD, J L -2nd Lieutenant - -Manchester Regiment-10/02/1916-23 -B. 275.
72 KNOTT, JOE, J -Private -47370-Hertfordshire Regiment-24/11/1918-29 -J. 4784.
73 LAMB, FRED, F -Private -4131089-Cheshire Regiment-07/11/1941-25 -Sec. S. Grave 12430.
73 LYON, T W -Private -4672-Durham Light Infantry-16/03/1917-20 -Screen Wall. War
75 MacKENZIE, J -Private -13320-Scots Guards-19/10/1916-39 -Screen Wall. War plot.
76 MACNEALL, JOSEPH, J -Sergeant (Air Gnr) -1508454-R.A.F. Vol Res /03/1943-33. W. 15414.
77 MARSDEN, WILLIAM, W -Private -180316-Machine Gun Corps (Infantry)-10/11/1918-20 -K. 5062.
78 MASON, HARRY, H -Lance Corporal -TR/London/68337-Royal Fusiliers-14/11/1917-23 -L. 6031.
79 MAWSON, CHARLES, C -Private -20960-Army Pay Corps-03/08/1918-33 -J. 4764.
80 MAYERS, DERRICK H, -Sergeant (Flt. Eng) -3010669-RAF Vol Res-14/02/1945 - S.Gr 12683.
81 McGRAN, P -Private -13358-Royal Scots-11/08/1916-31 -Screen Wall. War plot.
82 McGUIRE, PATRICK, P -Private -9508-Seaforth Highlanders-24/01/1919-29 -Screen Wall.
83 McLACHLAN, W -Farrier -TS/1107-Army Service Corps-26/08/1916-Unknown -Screen Wall.
84 McQUAID, J C -Serjeant -19386-Lincolnshire Regiment-17/02/1919-50 -W. 15478.
85 MEIKLE, G -Private -120912-Royal Army Medical Corps-17/10/1918-Unknown -Screen Wall.
86 MITCHELL, FRED, F -Private -13630-Cheshire Regiment-09/10/1919-42 -B. 290.
87 MORLEY, WILLIAM, W -Private -241773-Royal Scots Fusiliers-07/10/1918-41 -S. 12701.
88 MORRIS, FRED, F -Private -83575-Royal Army Medical Corps-21/02/1920-33 -C. 997.
89 MURRAY, JOHN, J -Corporal -2582-Royal Garrison Artillery-10/10/1918-Unknown -Screen Wall.
90 NEAL, HAROLD, H -Gunner -97602-Royal Field Artillery-29/10/1916-24 -J. 4698.
91 NELMS, ISAAC, I -Private -2702-Cheshire Regiment-09/01/1916-19 -Screen Wall.
92 ORD, FREDERICK, F -Serjeant -2608334-Cheshire Regiment-13/01/1944-43 -Sec. K. 5706.
93 PALFREYMAN, H -Private -18419-Cheshire Regiment-01/11/1918-33 -J. 4806.
94 PAMPHILON, KENNETH F.-Private -3389944-E Lancs Reg. -13/03/1942 -Sec. P. 8664.
95 PARR, CLIFFORD, C -Private -90579-Glamorgan Yeomanry-08/05/1917-18 -C. 973.
96 PAUL, J McN -Driver -318978-Canadian Field Artillery-07/05/1917-27 -J. 4707.
97 PAXTON, ALBERT JAMES, A J -Private -PLY/14663-Roy Mar Lt Inf-17/08/1917 -Screen Wall.
98 PEARSE, JOHN, J -Private -19248-Durham Light Infantry-19/10/1915-29 -Screen Wall. War plot.
99 PERKIN, JAMES HENRY, J H -Private -44829-Glouc. Regiment-08/12/1919-41 -Screen Wall
100 PICKERING, ELI, E -Serjeant -91292-Tank Corps-11/02/1918-29 -U. 13958.

101 PICKERING, ROY, -Signalman -2335902-R. Corps Signals-03/09/1940-Unknown -Sec. J. 4510.
 102 PICKFORD, JOHN THOMAS, J T -Private -64627-Cheshire Regiment-21/02/1919-32 -S. 12376.
 103 PITMAN, H R H -Private -S4/090114-Army Service Corps-08/10/1916-Unknown -Screen Wall.
 104 PIZZEY, R -Pioneer -WR/208687-Royal Engineers-12/04/1919-Unknown -Screen Wall.
 105 PRATT, G -Private -265081-South Lancashire Regiment-23/03/1917-Unknown -B. 453.
 106 QUINN, WILLIAM, W -Private -14657770-South Lancs Regiment-24/12/1943-27 -Sec. W. 14973.
 107 RAGGENBASS, JOHN, Serg (W.Op./Air Gnr.) -971156-RAFVR-30/11/1940-Unknown -X. 13300.
 108 ROBERTS, WILLIAM, -Lance Corp -P/7640-Mil Pol Cps-20/08/1918-Unknown -Screen Wall.
 109 ROGERS, DAVID, D -Private -69870-King's (L'pool Regiment)-29/10/1918-46 -Screen Wall.
 110 ROURKE, J -Private -36571-Cheshire Regiment-19/11/1918-35 -Screen Wall. War plot.
 111 ROWE, W H -Private -26002-Manchester Regiment-18/09/1916-Unknown -J. 4666.
 112 SCOTT, HAROLD HENRY, H H -Private -S/26798-Army Service Corps-12/01/1916-26 -J. 4600.
 113 SCOTT, WILLIAM, W -Private -1182-Cheshire Regiment-19/06/1915-Unknown -J. 4507.
 114 SHARP, J -Private -18156-Lancashire Fusiliers-29/11/1915-Unknown -Screen Wall. War plot.
 115 SHAW, JOHN JAMES, J J -Private -16496-Cheshire Regiment-10/01/1917-33 -J. 4719.
 116 SHONE, HAROLD LONSDALE, H L -Sec. Lieut. - -Reserve Cavalry Reg-10/07/1918-25 -B. 287.
 117 SHORT, T J -Private -6360-South Lancashire Regiment-19/07/1919-37 -B. C.E. 442.
 118 SIIDEBOTTOM, ABRAHAM,-Private -M2/053806-Army Service Corps-26/10/1918-29 -D. 1810.
 119 SMITH, ARTHUR, A -Lance Corp -17220-Manchester Reg-09/12/1917-Unknown -Screen Wall.
 120 SMITH, SAMUEL, S -Gunner -294503-Royal Garrison Artillery-04/03/1918-Unknown -U. 13732.
 121 STOCKDALE, W -Private -275-Royal Army Medical Corps-14/05/1916-Unknown -C. C. 684.
 122 SUTCLIFFE, C -Private -M2/101920-R.A.S.C-12/07/1919-Unknown -P. 10006.
 123 TAGGART, J -Gunner -116525-Royal Garrison Artillery-23/11/1918-Unknown -Screen Wall.
 124 TALBOT, GEORGE HENRY, G H -Private -241744-North Staffs Reg-25/05/1917-22 -Scr Wall. .
 125 TAYLOR, THOMAS,-Private -3661392-South Lancs Regiment-14/03/1942-Unknown - P. 9956.
 126 THOMPSON, J W -Private -62148-Cheshire Regiment-23/08/1917-31 -C.1154.
 127 THORNILEY, THOMAS, T -Private -M/340748-R.A.S.C.-27/11/1919-32 -Screen Wall
 128 TURNER, H -Private -3378394-East Lancashire Regiment-05/03/1921-Unknown -P. 8337..
 129 UNWIN, W H -Private -267898-Cheshire Regiment-11/11/1917-Unknown -J. 4321.
 130 VERMEULEN, J.F. Soldat, 1st Ligne. 28.10.1914
 131 WANT, G D -Private -2380-Cheshire Regiment-16/07/1915-Unknown -H.3918.
 132 WARREN, JOHN, J -Private -62017-Royal Welsh Fusiliers-27/12/1916-39 -Screen Wall.
 133 WATTS, SAMUEL, S -Private -3605263-East Lancs Regiment-11/05/1943-21 -Sec. P. 9988.
 134 WHITE, CECIL WILFRED, -Private -6108-Hampshire Regiment05/03//1918-25 -Screen Wall.
 135 WHITELEY, FRANK, F -Gunner -3519928-Royal Artillery-09/07/1941-34 -Sec. H. Grave 3768.
 136 WHITNEY, PHILIP, P -Gunner -1793975-Royal Artillery-21/06/1941-20 -Sec. X. Grave 13301.
 137 WILD, JOHN TUCKER,-Private -15551-South Lancashire Regiment-29/05/1918-46 -S. 12389.
 138 WILD, THOMAS WILLIAM, T W -Trumpeter -2642-Royal Engineers-11/12/1916-17 -C. 1146.
 139 WILKINSON, ERNEST, E -Private -4075-Cheshire Regiment-29/11/1918-34 -Screen Wall
 140 WILLIAMS, ALAN, A -Gunner -1567391-Royal Artillery-05/12/1941-35 -Sec. S. Grave 12500.
 141 WILLIAMSON, GEORGE DAVIDSON, -Priv. -74108-Mach Gun Cps (Inf)-16/11/1918 -Scrn Wall.
 142 WINTER, A E -Rifleman -323551-London Reg. (City of Lon. Rifles)-17/04/1919-21 -Screen Wall.
 143 WOOD, JOHN STANLEY, J S -Private -703412-London Regiment-15/04/1918-26 -Screen Wall.
 144 WORRALL, WILLIAM HOLLINGWORTH, -C. S. Major -3359-Man Reg-21/08/1916-56 -K. 5085.
 A well-attended service of Remembrance is held annually in Willow Grove Cemetery on Remembrance Sunday

Part 5

The Recent History of the Cemetery from 1960 to present.

The regular upkeep of a number of the military graves in Willow Grove went some way to ensuring that at least parts of the cemetery were cared for in the lengthy period between the end of WWI and the middle of the 20th century. A gradual decline in traditional civic burials had begun in the early 1930's when Stockport Crematorium was first opened, and Willow Grove was increasingly neglected as the cemetery company's income was reduced. Certainly by the 1960's public concern about the declining condition of the cemetery was causing grave-owners to turn to the local authority as a possible source of support. The corporation in turn tried to bring pressure on the cemetery company but with diminishing success. Some local authority officials appeared to do what they could at this stage to resist exploitation of the increasingly neglected cemetery site by private interests.

Willow Grove: No Tipping - Application to use the rear of Willow Grove Cemetery for controlled tipping has been refused to private developers. The Planning and Development Committee decided on this step after visiting the cemetery and surrounding area for a second time since August. Councillor Archie Whitesmith, chairman of the Planning Committee, told the Stockport Express: "We feel that the view of tipping would be very unsightly, and that aspect was overriding all others". Asked about the conditions within the cemetery itself, Councillor Whitesmith said the requirement for tidying-up and maintenance still stood, and that the corporation was pressing its demands. SE, 2 Feb, 1963

Both local newspapers, *The Stockport Advertiser* and *The Stockport Express* reported events and developments carefully, and their pages contained many items during the 1960's and 1970's, sometimes written to report local protests or in response to moves to close the site, but also in an effort to rouse the local community to the defence of the cemetery where so many local people had been buried in earlier years. But there was also a praiseworthy concern on the part of councillors at that time to consult grave-owners about any changes affecting the future of the cemetery: *Cemetery Face-Lift Hold-Up Stockport Corporation are expected to shelve plans to alter or renovate Willow Grove Cemetery until they have had talks with the grave-owners. Councillor Hoad said "We cannot accept any of these schemes until the grave-owners have made their suggestions. This cemetery has been the cause of many complaints from people in Reddish. SA, 4 Nov, 1971.*

In response to growing public concern Stockport Council's Development Committee took the radical decision early in 1972 to close the cemetery for burials and turn it into a garden of rest. The corporation now pressed ahead with its plan, bringing the lengthy negotiations with the cemetery company to a close. Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council bought the site in February 1973 through a compulsory purchase order and then pushed on with what local papers called "Operation Eyesore" to thoroughly clean up the cemetery. By the autumn of 1973 significant improvement work was well under way and the cemetery was soon in better condition than it had been for many years, although yet more needed to be done. Photographs accompanying this report showed the main avenue of the cemetery in a much improved condition with signs of clearing and tidying of weeds and shrubbery in the adjoining side-ways.

£25000 Spent on Willow Grove – and More Needed

The transformation of Willow Grove Cemetery into a lawn cemetery is slowly taking shape; the man-high weeds have gone; so have the broken kerbstones, and the litter, which led to the Stockport Express launching a campaign to have the place tidied up. There are at present 17000 graves in the cemetery. 5,500 inscriptions had to be copied, recorded and filed for future reference, as required by Law. A great volume of correspondence from the public who own graves at Willow Grove had been received. SE, 20 Sept, 1973

Despite this praiseworthy initiative the positive benefits of Operation Eyesore appear to have been only temporary. Regretfully the following thirty year period saw the overall condition of Willow Grove cemetery gradually decline once again. The degree of local interest in the preservation of the cemetery did not diminish however.

In May 2003 there began a series of events which once again brought the cemetery into the forefront of local concern with a very strong expression of feeling for the future preservation of the cemetery. The first of these events was linked to a Health and Safety Executive directive issued in early 2003 requiring local authorities to make safe any unstable and potentially dangerous cemetery memorials and monuments. The ensuing work produced scenes in the cemetery which caused great dismay to grave-owners.

Fury As Graves are Flattened

Furious relatives have hit out at Stockport Council's decision to lay gravestones down on the ground at a cemetery. More than 800 'unsafe' gravestones at Willow Grove cemetery have been laid down flat because of fears they would fall down and injure somebody. A spokeswoman for Stockport Council said the work that was being carried out at the cemetery was "unavoidable". She continued: "The Council is aiming to carry out this work with the minimum of distress to relatives. It has had to lay down 800 gravestones so far and there could be more as a result of the ongoing testing process. Every single one of the 16000 graves has been tested for safety. This is in line with what is happening nationally." SE, April 30, 2003

However as a result of popular feeling, the increasing likelihood of an independent inquiry helped to clarify the circumstances of the affair and restitution for the damaged memorials soon appeared a likely outcome.

Councillor Apologises for Distress to Mourners

A Senior Councillor at Stockport Council has apologised for the distress caused to the public as a result of health and safety work in the borough's cemeteries. Councillor Ingrid Shaw has responsibilities for Stockport's cemeteries and was asked to account for the approach taken to the work. She said: "I am, of course, happy to repeat my apology for the fact that this work has caused upset. We will learn from this experience and do all we can to ensure that, in future, Stockport's gravestones meet national monumental masonry standards". The committee requested the council's executive to make resources available to those relatives whose headstones had been damaged as a result of the work. SE, June 4, 2003

The formation of a group of grave-owners on June 12th, 2003, under the title The Gravestone Action Group helped significantly to represent the viewpoints of families

who were anxious to preserve the cemetery and to work towards its restitution. Mrs Sheila Robins, Secretary of the Gravestone Action Group of Stockport, said: “We are pleased the council is carrying out wider consultation with grave owners this year and if people do come forward, then any work which is needed can be properly discussed with them.” Soon after, Council leader Mark Hunter announced that an independent inquiry would be held. The Council’s further plans now began to look beyond the outcome of the forthcoming inquiry to the longer-term future of the borough’s cemeteries.

Independent Grave Inquiry to Go Ahead

Mark Hunter, Liberal Democrat leader of the council, said: “I am very pleased we have finally managed to put party politics aside and reach agreement on a way forward...this has been a very emotive issue and the local safety programme has been controversial.”
SE, August 6, 2003

Subsequently the council accepted all the recommendations of the Special inquiry, which called for Stockport Council to pay for headstones to be reinstated and to apologise to individuals affected by its actions. Councillors also pledged to work closely with residents to improve the cemeteries. Contact was quickly made between the Council and The Gravestone Action Group and agreement was reached to work together in what promised to be a new start for Stockport’s cemeteries. During this period The Gravestone Action Group was gaining further support and evolving to become The Friends of Stockport Cemeteries. Great progress had been made and the support and co-operation of the Borough Council had been secured. Although there were still some delays and set-backs caused by individual acts of vandalism and monitoring of progress continued to be necessary, advances began to be made in the restoration of the cemetery.

Part 6

The Future of Willow Grove cemetery: The Restoration and Re-development Plan of 2004

In September 2004 Stockport Borough Council published its comprehensive *Willow Grove Cemetery - Restoration and Development Plan*. This document proposed a major restoration plan, with detailed projections of many improvements in an imaginative and comprehensive scheme of redevelopment. These projections included memorial restoration, involving the reinforcement of exposed foundations, the reinstatement of headstones where possible and the sensitive restoration of certain important memorials. Further targets were far-sighted and enlightened. The vegetation and habitat of the cemetery were to become the subject of work from the Council’s Nature Development Team to maximise the wildlife potential of the cemetery, while allowing the area to be sympathetically maintained. Improvement of the habitat for butterflies, birds, insects and bats and an increase in the vegetation diversity were to be taken into account. Paths within the cemetery were to be restored and improved. The cemetery boundaries were to be planted with hawthorn hedges and metal railings installed between the cemetery and the footpath alongside the adjacent avenue. Landscape improvements would include seating areas within the cemetery. The

cemetery entrance would be the subject of a major improvement, with new gates and parking facilities within the cemetery. The Redevelopment Plan showed that substantial funding would be needed for the restoration programme, phased over several years.

A milestone in the restitution process was reached when new gates were installed at Willow Grove in 2006 and the many contributors to this successful public effort were acknowledged: *Heritage Group Salutes Work at Old Cemetery*

Attractive new gates to what was once a 'lost and forgotten cemetery' were officially opened by the Mayor of Stockport, Councillor Peter Burns. Councillor Burns performed the recent ceremony at Willow Grove Cemetery in Central Drive, South Reddish. The gates cost £4,500 and were paid for with a £1500 grant from the Tame Valley Area Committee to Friends of Stockport Cemeteries and additional money from the council. Brian Leigh, secretary of the Friend's group, which was set up to campaign for conservation, respect and public understanding for Stockport's heritage cemeteries, made a speech thanking everyone who had contributed to the project. Willow Grove at one time became run down, but is now being revived thanks to the Friends and the Borough. And Friend's secretary Sheila Robins said: "Carefully managed churchyard cemeteries are so important. In old cemeteries, we need to recognise that conservation is not about letting things grow unchecked, but about positive management."

SE photo Summer 2006

By mid-2006 it could be said that at least some of the outcomes of the Willow Grove Restoration and Redevelopment Plan were beginning to come to fruition and a brighter future for the cemetery came into sight. The Friends of Stockport Cemeteries has the following text on its website which looks back on recent events in the history of Willow Grove and sets a positive tone for the future of the cemetery:

Following a major headstone safety testing programme in 2003 more than 1600 headstones had to be laid down to prevent them presenting a health and safety hazard. Since then the Council has worked closely with FOSC to agree and deliver an improvement programme. Stockport Council has completed the reinstatement of more than 200 headstones and a rolling programme of work is in place to eventually complete the reinstatement of all laid-down headstones. Other improvements include new perimeter fences, the reduction of overgrown trees and shrubs to improve sight lines through the cemetery to increase the feeling of light, space and personal safety, and improvements in grounds maintenance in the most recent sections. External funding obtained by FOSC in 2005 and 2007 enabled us to work together to install new gates and many habitat improvements for the benefit of wildlife. We have also installed new benches and bins and planted ornamental trees to improve the area around the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Screen Wall of Remembrance. In 2010 FOSC completed another restoration project to improve access and to improve the use of the cemetery for education, reflection and leisure. Funded by the Big Lottery Community Spaces programme in partnership with Stockport Council, it has been developed sympathetically with careful consideration to protecting the special character of the cemetery. In addition to path improvements heritage and tree trails have been created through this unique landscape. (www.friendsofstockportcemeteries.co.uk)

A Military Cemetery Trail, conducted by the North Region Air Cadets, is planned as

part of the Remembrance Sunday celebrations. Local schools have begun to use the cemetery site as an environmental resource, and the cemetery website⁽¹¹⁾ offers teachers' notes⁽¹²⁾ to encourage this important educational work in the cemetery with children and young people. The Friends of Stockport Cemeteries have produced leaflets explaining and exploring the site in *The Willow Grove Tree Trail*⁽¹³⁾, and *Willow Grove Cemetery: Discover a Hidden Treasure*⁽¹⁴⁾. Several websites lined to Willow Grove now also serve to promote the cemetery and the work of FOSC⁽¹⁵⁾. Increasing recognition and public use of the site as a community amenity are evident from greater numbers of visitors to the site and increasing awareness of the importance of the cemetery. While these improvements are real and great credit is due to members of FOSC and others who have worked so hard for their realisation, continuing efforts towards the promotion of the restored and redeveloped Willow Grove Cemetery as a community space and resource continue to be necessary.

The Friends of Stockport Cemeteries⁽¹⁶⁾ are keen to gather verbatim accounts drawn from family histories, old photographs and other surviving sources that might provide little known facts about the cemetery. If you would like to offer support to FOSC in its ongoing work you are warmly invited to contact Friends of Stockport Cemeteries.

Notes and sources:

- 1 Willow Grove Cemetery Heritage Trail: The Lost and Forgotten Cemetery Project (2010).
- 2 The Reddish Green History Trail - Reddish Vale School History Department, Stockport MBC Libraries S/27E.
- 3 Ordnance Survey, South Reddish and Brinnington, Lancashire Sheet No:112.05,1893.
- 4 Census report 1851, Stockport MBC Libraries.
- 5 Census report 1851, Stockport MBC Libraries.
- 6 A complete list of burials at Willow Grove is available in the local authority records department Stockport Burial Records, Stockport Cemetery, Buxton Rd, Stockport SK2 6LS 0161 480 5221
- 7 The outline map shows a section plan of the cemetery and is taken from The Willow Grove Heritage Trail, The Lost and Forgotten Cemetery Project 2010
- 8 Frederick Whittaker Scott Company Catalogue, undated. SMB Stockport Local Heritage Library, accessed March 2011
- 9 Stockport Heritage Library, 'St. Joseph's School Centenary Souvenir, 1882-1982'. An additional booklet 'Joseph Higginson and St. Joseph's Church, Reddish', by Mike Kiernan, is available from St. Mary's Heritage, Stockport Market Place website: www.mikeslocalhistory.zoomshare.com
- 10 Commonwealth War Graves Commission, War Graves in Willow Grove Cemetery www.cwgc.org
- 11 www.friendsofstockportcemeteries.co.uk
- 12 Teachers' Resource notes www.willowgrove.org.uk/
- 13 Willow Grove Tree Trail www.willowgrove.org.uk/
- 14 Willow Grove Cemetery: Discover a Hidden Treasure. www.willowgrove.org.uk
- 15 www.friendsofstockportcemeteries.co.uk
- 16 www.friendsofstockportcemeteries.co.uk

Acknowledgements in the text show *Stockport Express* as *SE*; *Stockport Express Annual* as *SEAnn*; and *Stockport Advertiser* as *SA*.



Willow Grove Cemetery Entrance

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