

for all our babies born asleep 1932-1983

Throughout history there are many amazing facts of interest that raise one's emotions and sometimes past practices come to light that most people nowadays would find difficult to understand. One such tradition of history was discovered within Hedge End Town Council archives quite recently.

During recent archiving Hedge End Town Council in Hampshire discovered documents referring to the interment of 30 stillborn babies within our Albert Road Cemetery and whilst records identified registration of their parents and the date of burial, it had remained a mystery as to the location of their interment. However, the documents clearly explained why their location had not been identified – they were laid to rest in unconsecrated ground.



History indicates that prior to the 1980's it was customary that stillborn babies were interred in such land. Parents were not told where their child lay, or given the option to hold a funeral. It would also seem that there was a train of thought that, as there was no opportunity for the child to be baptised, it was laid to rest in an unconsecrated area and the parents urged to forget. Consequently, it has long been the unmentionable, undisclosed and unidentified area of Albert Road Cemetery which the Town Council now wished to remedy as sensitively and respectfully as possible.

In the first instance both staff and Councillors referred to rumour of a location, which none could verify as the last interment had taken place long before employment or serving Council. However, a former now retired funeral director was able to concur that he too had been of the impression that the burials had taken place within the bank of the boundary at the end of the cemetery.

The register of the Burial of Stillborn Children provided the date of burial and the names of parents but it was not until archives dating back to 1957 were uncovered, that Council were able to identify addresses and found that the babies came from the surrounding areas of Millbrook, Butlocks Heath, Netley Abbey, Bursledon, West End and Sholing as well as Hedge End – this may also indicate that the parents were not made aware of the final resting place of their child. In recent years, we had been approached by a man searching for his sibling's grave and, when we found his parents were named in the Register for Stillborn Children, he was shocked to see that the name of the child had not been entered. However, this was the requirement of the time. But then to learn that the baby lay in unconsecrated land was of very little comfort as we were unable to identify a specific grave. Indeed, we could only suggest the area by hearsay.

It is our duty, as a Burial Authority, to ensure that no interment/grave is disturbed and whilst the remaining areas of Albert Road Cemetery decrease, it might have been a suggestion long into the future to inter in the very ground that remained unconsecrated through the mere fact that it had not been identified as interred.

'Sands' (the stillbirth and neonatal death charity), has been campaigning for sympathetic burial, cremation and memorials for babies with considerable success in recent years. Community baby memorial areas are appearing in cemeteries, crematoria and hospital grounds, and cemeteries are increasingly setting up children's burial and memorialisation sections. We resolved that it was time that corrective measures were taken and that this part of Albert Road Cemetery should be recognised.

With the assistance of funding from a County Councillor Grants Scheme we commissioned a commemorative stone with the words "For All Babies Born Asleep 1932 - 1983" to be placed to identify the area of the cemetery. The memorial, a former exhibition model of dark-grey all polished granite with an angel carved insert and gold leaf lettering, was unveiled during a dedication service conducted by Churches Together on the first day of spring, Saturday 21st March, 2015.



Denise Lowth, Deputy Town Clerk