

## solving a burial space problem in five days

For many years Stafford Borough Council has suffered with poor ground conditions at Eccleshall Road Cemetery and, to a lesser degree, certain sections at Stone Cemetery. This hampered the safe excavation of grave spaces. Bereavement Services Manager, Anthony Evans MICCM (Dip), explains how they found a solution and were able to open Eccleshall Road to new interments.

### The problems:

- The closure of Eccleshall Road Cemetery, right, for new interments even though there is valuable virgin ground that could be utilised.
- The loss of grave spaces due to collapse.
- An uneconomical method of laying out graves as the virgin ground between each burial has to be extended for safety reasons, particularly at Eccleshall Road.

All of the above added additional pressure on the amount of existing grave spaces available to this burial authority and while Eccleshall Road remained closed it denied the choice element to those residing in the northern end of Stafford.



### What did we do?

Methodology is constantly changing and being improved. There are now readily available pre-formed chambers that can be included in the development of any new cemetery. This does increase the financial burden at the development stage but can increase the available grave space up to threefold.

We found a company who have developed a new and unique concept of cemetery safety by pre-installing a below ground interlocking modular shoring system that will completely eliminate grave subsidence or collapse by structurally supporting and retaining all loose and unstable ground surrounding open graves, thus providing a safety measure to both cemetery staff and the public alike.

The site is first excavated to the pre-determined size and depth. The modular shoring system is assembled and all excavated spoil is backfilled into the modular shoring chambers, compacted and finished to any existing ground level.

The modular shoring system can be assembled to an elevated level if necessary before backfilling and additional modular chambers can easily be added on to the system through its unique interlocking design. Upon the re-opening of any modular grave chamber, structural retaining side and end walls will prevent any cave-in or collapse of the grave prior, during or after any interment.

*1. Well there's no going back now! The first level of top soil is removed.*



Work began on a Monday morning, the installation took 48 hours, ground works were completed and our first interment took place on the Friday.

*2. One of several original grave markers unearthed on the site...*



*...and the benefits of this work is already being experienced!*



3. The Focus DIY car park allowed for safe delivery and storage of the actual units. They were then manhandled onto the site just across the pathway.



4. The excavation created interest from the public both those passing along the pathway and visitors to existing grave spaces. Information notices were already on display at the appropriate entrances to the cemetery. In addition a member of the Bereavement Services team was also on hand to explain in full the actual process. It was encouraging to listen to the public's positive reaction.



5. It's now late on Monday morning and serious excavations are well under way.



6. The serious business of getting it all in and level is under way.



7. The operation was watched with great interest by external Health and Safety consultants employed by the contractors.



8. With the outer frame in and level the individual grave spaces are now being formed, 12 in total and the same dimensions as any other grave space 9' x 4'. As the units are built up so the backfilling continues.



9. The internal grave spaces are backfilled in the same manner as with any grave space. The grave to the right of the picture is being left opened for the interment on Friday. A small amount of water can be seen on the inside right of the grave space.



10. Day two, Tuesday afternoon and the shoring is all in and the grading of the area is underway. Due to the levels of the ground it soon became apparent we were going to be short of soil.



11. With the area raked over ready to accommodate the new turf and grass seed, all units are in place. The boarded area is the now open grave space ready for the forthcoming interment on Friday. This is the first in the row. The remaining eleven graves are all to the left of this one.



12. StreetScene were behind the scenes and quickly moved in to give the area that "polished" look. 20 Tonnes of soil was brought in from our Tixall Rd site and used to level off the areas where there was a shortfall.



13. Friday and the finished area, the grave space neatly dressed and ready to accommodate the coffin later that day. Full credit goes to StreetScene for their support in achieving this valuable goal.



This is what we are about at Stafford BC – addressing the need for burial space and providing choice for the bereaved; Eccleshall Road Cemetery is once again open for new interments after many years of closure. We can now utilise ground that before was considered too unsafe to excavate. Even more importantly we have enabled a gentleman, who for reasons of infirmity had lived in Surrey with his family for the last few years, to be buried in the north end of the borough where he was born eighty-six years ago.

If you would like any further information please contact me at [aevans@staffordbc.gov.uk](mailto:aevans@staffordbc.gov.uk)

**Tony Evans**

